Staging Difference: Queer Theory and Gender in British Performance, 1968-1998

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This thesis proposes a relationship between Queer Theory and the development of performance conventions in British theatre in the period 1968 to 1998. The basis of that relationship is a theoretical account of subjectivity, rooted in feminist and psychoanalytic critiques of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality – primarily in the works of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz. That account challenges the essential construction of gendered identity and seeks to detail the ways in which certain subjectivities are rendered legitimate or illegitimate, marked or unmarked.

The notion of conditional subjectivities is first explored through a critical analysis of camp performance as a form of parody which reflexively invokes that which it challenges. Round the Horne is discussed as an example of the mainstream acceptance and use of camp, noting in particular the problematic presence of "polari," a form of gay slang.

The consequent issues of self-identification raised by camp leads to a discussion of the work of the Gay Sweatshop who sought to control and redefine the representation of gay subjects in mainstream theatre and television. This issue of authentic representation as political necessity is then pursued through the work of Tony Kushner and Ron Athey, considering performative responses to the AIDS crisis and the reality of subjects marked by AIDS or HIV infected bodies.

The potential impasse created by Queer Theory's account of the material body is explored through a discussion of unmarked race and desire in Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock's production of the play Cloud Nine, and in the representation of lesbian identity in the work of Jill Posener, Jackie Kay and Michelene Wandor.

Finally, issues of representation and legitimacy are explored through the evolution of Pride from protest march to carnival celebration to offer a potential model of queer

performance not as a radical alternative operating "outside" of normative cultural discourse, but a process of working the weaknesses within that norm.

The relationship between Queer Theory and British performance in this period articulates a challenge to essentialist accounts of subjectivity. This challenge is manifested in a relationship between theatrical performance conventions and methodologies of political activism: it describes a pursuit of forms of performance which might account for marginal subjects, recognising the precarious historical and cultural conditions in which marginal subjects appear at all.

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Introduction

This thesis proposes a relationship between Queer Theory and the development of performance conventions in British theatre in the period 1968 to 1998. The basis for that relationship is given through a theoretical account of subjectivity, rooted in feminist and psychoanalytic critiques of the relationship between sex, gender and sexuality – primarily in the works of Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Eve Sedgwick. These critiques articulate a challenge to an essentialised model of identity and instead argue for subjectivity as the product of competing cultural discourses. In turn, this sense of subjectivity allows an analytical discussion of the sense that "difference" might play in the construction of marginal subjects.

This notion of a performed rather than pregiven subject establishes the ground for a detailed reading of texts and performance practices which might describe the operation of such cultural discourses. As such, the choice of works within this project reflects an interest in forms of performance which are consciously involved (both theatrically and politically) in the issue of representation: how identity might be rendered legitimate or illegitimate, marked or unmarked.

Chapter 1: Queer Territories

This chapter offers a formulation of queer theoretical concerns and the territory from which "queer subjects" might emerge. Drawing on the counter-essentialist arguments of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, this discussion recognises the relationship between feminist and gay and lesbian analyses, while resisting a simple foreclosing reintegration of those perspectives and the reification of a non-heterosexual, queer subjectivity. This critical foregrounding traces the emergence of queer theory from feminist challenges to fixed categories of sex and gender, questioning a presumptive separation of cultural fantasy and material fact. Consequently, a challenge to a presumed symmetrical sameness of male and female bodies – and male and female

subjectivities – considers Julia Kristeva's account of the semiotic as a means of resistance to the rhetorical opposition of homo and hetero, "transparent" and "contrived." In turn, that discussion begins a critical analysis of "coming out" that will continue throughout this thesis, recognising the claim on a liberational act of self-determination but questioning how that activity might, per Butler, still leave a culturally homophobic "centre" intact.

This chapter also introduces the interpretative framework of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (primarily through the reading of Lacan articulated by Elizabeth Grosz) to consider the claim on the Real or authentic body in terms of a discourse or economy of desire. That framework also provides the basis for an understanding of sexual identity in terms of desiring and being desired – as discursive process rather than pregiven constituency. The discussion of identity as a discursive process then moves to the question of cultural legitimacy, expanding on Butler's sense of "speakability" to consider what renders certain subjects intelligible, and others unintelligible. That issue of social recognition leads to the consideration of how a queer subjectivity might be positioned on the border of cultural legitimacy and coherency. Finally, the question of legitimacy and political agency is explored through developments in "queer legal theory," where Paisley Currah, Janet Halley, Cal Stychen and others have suggested the possibilities of identification over identity, eschewing the politics of official recognition for a sense of reiterative patterns of affiliation and participation.

Chapter 2: Camp theory and camp performance

This chapter considers the potential of camp as a form of performativity which appears to cut across an oppositional matrix of heterosexual and non-heterosexual subjects. Through a reading of camp as a heightened, self-aware form of performativity, this discussion explores the possibilities of a subjectivity articulated through self-recognition: I know who I am by seeing what I am and what I am not.

This speculative form of subjectivity is introduced through a critical examination of Susan Sontag's "Notes On Camp" and an assessment of the notion of "being-as-playing-a-role." In particular, the discussion of "Notes on Camp" challenges Sontag's characterisation of camp as apolitical and recognises the potential subversive qualities of camp as comic performance. However, that claim on subversion is balanced by a discussion of the potentially problematic qualities of camp (such as stereotype and the accusation of misogyny) and the apparent rejection of camp by many of those involved in mainstream political activism and performance. That discussion offers an analytical account of camp as a form of parody, recognising a persistent and potentially problematic relationship between original and copy.

In turn, that analysis draws on Elizabeth Grosz' work to offer a psychoanalytic critique of camp that suggests that gender parody can act to expose the relentless and essentially unfulfillable pursuit of a secure identity as a "man" or "woman" – to describe the pursuit of essentialised masculinity and femininity in terms of a chain of surrogates that stand in for the unreachable object of desire. This notion of surrogacy suggests – as in the work of Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed – the possibilities of camp in resisting the homogenisation of non-heterosexual subjectivity. This theoretical discussion then leads to an analysis of the tradition of camp performance within British culture: of the mainstream popularity of the Carry On series and focussing primarily on the radio series Round the Horne. A close reading of Round the Horne then acts to illustrate various uses of parody – of recognisable cultural forms taken up, enlarged and re-written – and assesses with particular interest the use of "polari," a form of gay slang, within that performance.

That discussion of polari draws primarily on Paul Baker's research into its origins and use, considering the role of a seemingly private language within public performance and how, as an "anti-language," polari might act to establish a counter-cultural community with a broader normative environment. Such a tentative community, it is argued, may offer the potential for like-minded subjects to identify themselves to each other without necessarily "coming out." Furthermore, the process

of lexicalisation involved in polari suggests the possibilities of working within a given cultural framework rather than striving for an alternative system of signification.

Chapter 3: Gay Sweatshop and the performance of social change

This section of the thesis considers the development of consciously political gay and lesbian movements in the UK, centred on civil and social rights agendas across Europe – and the relationship between that activism and the emergence of specific companies and theatrical conventions. Both political and theatrical activisms are shown to be based in a belief in the value of gay people working collectively and openly to effect social change. Through that claim on collectivism, this discussion considers the development of theatrical companies working to address the representations of gay and lesbian subjects in mainstream entertainment which are characterised as limited, stereotypical and derogatory. That movement is exemplified through a discussion of the work and workings of the Gay Sweatshop theatre company, whose origins lie in the community-based work of Ed Berman's Inter-Action: a charity intended to equip specific social groups with the skills and opportunities to create and control their own theatrical representations.

This account of Gay Sweatshop charts the company's emergence from an early involvement with Inter-Action as a group dedicated to "working some change" in their audience and encouraging other theatre practitioners to come out and work on similar projects. Central to that agenda is a question of authenticity and legitimacy in representation, apparent in protracted discussion of whether the personnel of Gay Sweatshop should be both gay and openly gay. The development of that policy discussion is informed by the company's use of post-performance discussion groups and the concurrent expectations of audience members for performers to live the lives that they portrayed.

While the divergent demands of representing gay men and lesbians lead to two separate touring companies under a mutual company banner, this chapter suggests

that the experiences of touring with Any Woman Can and Mister X (with the women's and men's companies respectively) describe similar relationships between "real lives" and the dramatic representation of those lives on stage. The continuity of that demand for authenticity is then explored as a significant influence in the development of the company's working methods and choice of theatrical convention – and considers which forms of activism that those choices might permit and elide.

Chapter 4: AIDS theatre and the demands of the Real

This chapter considers the theatrical response to the advent of HIV and AIDS, recognising how this event has raised complications for the kinds of claim on authenticity in representation described in the preceding chapter. The advent of AIDS also describes, it is argued, the circumstances in which an account of the material body is essential – or rather, where the failure to represent AIDS-marked subjects might have dire consequences.

This discussion first considers various responses which attempt to resist or deny a medicalising and pathologising narrative of non-heterosexual identity. Drawing on Susan Sontag's "metaphoric genealogy" of AIDS as both invasion and pollution, an attempt is made to position the AIDS-marked subjects within a persistent rhetoric of symbolic – and potentially literal – threat to the body politic. The positioning of AIDS within existing cultural narratives leads to a close reading of Tony Kushner's Angels in America sequence, and the possibility of reading the advent of AIDS as both a historical crisis and a crisis of history – a chronic failure of existing cultural narratives to recognise and represent the consequences of inhabiting material bodies. This critique draws upon the work of Walter Benjamin to suggest a methodology of "stillstellung," recognising Kushner's invocation of Benjamin's "Angel of History" as an expression of the interruption of the "mechanical process" of history.

The significance of a persistent material body is then discussed through the activist work of ACT UP during the transition of AIDS from "death sentence" to "chronic manageable illness," and in the work of Ron Athey, whose performances centre upon

his own HIV-marked body and blood. Athey's use of religious iconography within his work is used to argue for an understanding of the interrelation of symbolic representation and material presence – and of the possibilities for expression within a seemingly foreclosing system of representation. In particular, Athey's work indicates a potential abandonment of the pursuit of a "cure" or a return to "disease-free abandon" – a rejection of binaries of safe sex versus dangerous sex, hetero-sex versus homo-sex – and in its place suggests a rhetoric of wilful persistence that challenges existing narratives of the body.

The potential of such alternatives is then further explored in the work of Aputheatre (formally the AIDS Positive Underground Theatre Company) with gay men and women affected by AIDS, suggesting how the AIDS crisis might act to revitalise a gay politics limited by a focus on citizenship through consumption. This demand for political engagement emerges from the argument that recognition of the material body demands recognition of the social, political and historical circumstances of that body – echoing ACT UP's slogan that "AIDS is a political crisis."

Chapter 5: Queer desire and fantasies of race

Issues of performing the material body (and a recognition of the political and historical circumstances of subjects) lead to a discussion of the discourse of race and the construction of racially-marked subjects. Building on prior challenges to essentialisms of sex and gender, this chapter considers the way in which such subjects might further inform a sense of queer subjectivity. In particular, and through articulating a resistance to the conclusion that "all difference is the same kind of difference," this chapter argues for an understanding of fantasy in the circulation of desire as formative of both identity and desirability. That sense of fantasy is informed by a reading of sex and race in Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine as historically and culturally specific discourses.

Preceding that textual analysis is an exploration of the specific qualities of racial signification through Ross Chambers' account of the "unmarkedness" of white

identities. Through an understanding that such "unmarkedness" operates as the grounds on which the marked status of racial identity is constructed, that analysis suggests certain implicit relationships of power and authority which determine which subjects are normative or not, and can "pass," or not. This discussion of racial identity then suggests a similar structure in the "unmarkedness" of heterosexuality – within a presumptively straight (or compulsorily heterosexual) culture – complicated by the knowledge that same-sex desire might be concealed and might pass for the unmarked norm. This extension of knowledge of the closet indicates the ways in which sexual and racial identities are formulated and performed through discourses of desire and status which are interdependent.

That interrelationship is then explored through an examination of the text and performance of Cloud Nine, and the workshop methodology of Joint Stock which informed both Churchill's authorship and the choice of theatrical convention in the original production. In particular, the discussion assesses the development of performance practices that attempt to make racial and sexual expectations explicit through the cross-casting of both race and sex. In turn, that discussion of convention recognises a potentially problematic absence of black performers and considers, in response, the nature of Cloud Nine as colonial fantasy, arguing that the staging of black bodies is a means of articulating white desires. Finally, this chapter offers alternative stagings for Cloud Nine which might make this critical engagement with race, desire and sexuality more transparent, suggesting a gestic quality for the staging of identity that might be potentially accessed through an inversion of "blacking up" in the representation of the servant boy, Joshua.

Chapter 6: Invisible Women: the representation of lesbian identity and desire

Further to recognising the specific inflections of race – as something more than a marginal or secondary discourse to the construction of sex and sexuality – this chapter speculates how this complex sense of marginality might impact upon the representation of female sexual identity. Through a discussion of texts centred on the representation of lesbian and non-heterosexual female identities, this element of the

thesis examines performative strategies that have previously been assumed as universally viable modes of self-determination – notably the emphasis on social visibility and "coming out."

Part of this critique of activist and queer critical process acknowledges the claim that queer theory has a gay male subject as its implicit referent and examines criticism of both Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler on those grounds. Identifying how performance might be defined as specifically "lesbian theatre," this chapter focuses on three texts to suggest specific social locations in which female same-sex desire appears, is constructed and then delimited: Jill Posener's Any Woman Can, Jackie Kay's Twice Over and Michelene Wandor's Care and Control.

Any Woman Can suggests the nature of multiple, overlapping claims on identity: that "coming out" does not simply involve the occupation of a singular social location. Rather than providing an account of a closeted subject, this text is used to argue for a subject who is not "discovered," but has always existed in plain sight. In the place of pre-emptive closeting is a sexuality that is systematically unmarked and unrepresentable. Building on the notion of multiple, divergent and contested social roles, Twice Over indicates the significance of familial and extra-familial identities and – though ultimately encouraging the practice – appears to recognise that "coming out" involves a certain surrender of the ability to self-determine. Discussion of Care and Control further articulates a sense of conflicting social expectations, noting the persistence of a gender-specific essentialism that collapses heterosexuality, the female body, mothering and reproduction. That particular form of essentialism is shown to manifest in the apparent incompatibility of lesbian identity with those social obligations, notably in the construction of lesbianism within the legal framework of the 1980s as antithetic to "family" and child-rearing.

That context provides the basis for a challenge to Mark Blasius' claim to an "ethics" of "coming out," arguing that such a claim to ethical behaviour presents a problematic and potentially reductionist account of collectivism. Such a claim, it is argued, assumes a uniformity to the context and consequences of "coming out" and

asserts the possibility of creating "new historical conditions" which does not recognise the specific cultural and social locations that permit or deny such agency.

Chapter 7: Prejudice and Pride: change in the performance of queer protest

The question of agency and activism is further pursued through a history of the changing conventions and performance practices surrounding Pride, describing a shift of emphasis from protest march to carnival celebration. This apparent transition is presented through an analysis of performance conventions which attempt to establish a persistent relationship between audience and performer, and resist the passive reception of performance. This notion of participatory protest is explored through a discussion of the temporary coalition between gay and lesbian activists and the mining union community during the national strike of 1984-85, recognising how marginal but non-identical groups might be mobilised to mutual ends. That discussion also examines the specific historical context which made the collectivist utopianism of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners possible.

This sense of functional, pragmatic political activity is given parallel in the directly issue-led first wave of Pride marches: public protests with specific issue agendas such as the age of consent. These early forms are then contrasted with a later emphasis on carnival activity, or "Mardi Gras," which has emerged and gathered strength since the 1990s. This apparent transition from protest to celebration is shown to have been marked by the appearance of professional organisers for large-scale events and a concurrent change of criteria for a "successful" Pride event: away from directly political activity toward successful or responsible financial management.

That shift will be shown to have provoked a sharply critical response, notably from gay and human rights activist Peter Tatchell who frames the commercialisation and depoliticisation of Pride within a normative social contract of "good behaviour." That critique is assessed through Baz Kershaw's characterisation of carnival as the site of both containment and excess, an account which draws on the work of Mikhail

Bakhtin to emphasise the persistent heritage of carnival's origins in a hierarchy of feudalism. That question of potential limits for large scale activism through performance is explored through a parallel account of the Lysistrata project, a simultaneous world-wide staging of Aristophanes' Lysistrata as a protest against the war in Iraq.

The potential for the repoliticisation of Pride is then examined in the development of Brighton Pride, which has sought to mobilise a carnival event as the means to raise funds for a number of community projects. Rather than "reviving" Pride as a site of activism in the sense of the earliest protest marches, Brighton's organisers appear to have adapted the purpose of that performance to service political activity in other environments. A further response to contemporary Pride is explored in the work of Gay Shame – a group primarily active in New York and San Francisco which stages counter-Pride protests that are critical of growing corporate sponsorship and challenge the failure of Pride's marginal community to mobilise on the part of other marginal communities. Here, Gay Shame's work suggests the possibilities of "excessive" performance which test or exceed the safe boundaries set for a "socially acceptable" Pride – acting, as their slogan defines their work, as "the virus in the system" to find the weakness within the norm.

Conclusion: The Conditions of Marginality

Drawing on this project's varied discussions of performative challenges to the notion of pregiven subjectivities, this thesis argues for a potential activism that goes beyond an uncomplicated claim on sameness. In addressing the specific social, political and historical locations in which different subjectivities emerge, this thesis argues against the compartmentalisation of the discourses which might be formative of identity.

In doing so, it suggests the possibilities of a more complex understanding of the relationship between theatrical conventions and the methodologies of political activism. Such a relationship describes a pursuit of forms of performance which

might more fully account for marginal subjects, recognising the precarious historical and cultural conditions in which marginal subjects appear at all.

Chapter 1: Queer Territories

This thesis seeks to describe the interplay between queer theory, gender and performance practices in Britain. Beginning in recognition of the discursive framework that has enabled the emergence of "queer thinking," I want to attempt to describe the developing relationships between critical theory, performance practice and political activism. In doing so, I will argue for a sense of queer performance as non-identical: where choice of performance convention is strongly linked to the social location and political agenda of its production, and where the representation of marginality is marked by diversity rather than homogeneity.

Central to the development of a queer critical analysis is an awareness of counter-essentialist readings of gender, sexuality and the body. Though this deconstructionist approach forms the basis of this project, it is important to consider what might constitute other border markers for a queer theoretical territory, notably psychoanalytic criticism, and the notion of a performative subjectivity. In particular, that idea of performativity will be informed by the work of Judith Butler. Consequently, a part of this situational analysis will be to suggest the relationship between the emancipatory desires and potential of queer performativity and a heterosexist, homophobic dominant cultural paradigm.

This introduction to a queer critical landscape will not entail a direct historical account of particular events or authors, and the choice of critical material will primarily prepare for a later discussion of performative strategies, groups and texts. This choice is intended to avoid a brief and unsatisfactory survey of lesbian, gay male and feminist movements and thought which inform queer theory. The existence of queer theory would be unimaginable without the preceding decades of work in lesbian and gay studies and politics; yet the goal of queer theory is precisely to interrogate the identity positions from which that work is produced.[1] It is necessary to maintain a sense of accountability between feminist and lesbian and gay analysis

[1] Sally O'Driscoll, "Outlaw Readings: Beyond Queer Theory," Signs: the Journal of Women in Culture and Society 22.1 (1996): 30.

while resisting a premature and foreclosing reintegration with those discourses.[2] Rather, this discussion seeks to defer the consideration and assessment of that material to specific contexts of particular performative practices. This thesis, therefore, will proceed initially with a genealogical reading of queer thought that purposefully avoids a narrativisation that a simpler historical reading might suggest: that, for example, queer thought is simply the direct descendant of a particular branch of gender theory, or that queer thought is a development of lesbian and gay studies by a post-AIDS crisis generation. The particular relationship between AIDS and queer performance will be explored in closer detail later in this project, with the intention of considering the ways in which queer theory might act to evade a homophobic, pathologising history of homosexuality.

This critical process is also informed by Eve Sedgwick's critique of Foucault and Halperin, in whom she identifies the propensity towards "knowingness" through a contrast of previous historicized homosexual subjects and "what we know now."[3] A conscious effort must be made to avoid the refamiliarizing, naturalizing or reifying of a non-heterosexist subject, an effort that acknowledges the error in writing such a subject as "a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory and conflictual forces." Even a knowing history of the queer subject could propagate "a dangerous consensus of knowingness about the unknown."[4] Instead, it is the intention of this introduction to explore how queer theory can be used to argue for an integral discontinuity of that "unknown," and to ask in what manner the "unknown" might then be articulated. In turn, this will function as the first stage in examining the constitutive links between queer theory and performative practice. This project will thus be marked by a genealogical history, rather than a temporal one – a history that will form the basis for the argument that other discourses (such as race or Empire) which are not directly "queer" impact significantly on the reception and propagation of queer thinking. An attempt will be made to construct a kind of cumulative analysis, one that does not allow one model

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[2] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet (New York, London: London Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 16.
[3] Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet 44-7.
[4] Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet 45.

of non-heterosexist relations to be merely superseded by another, and so drop out of the frame of discourse.[5]

I would like, therefore, to approach this problem by asking first what kind of thinking has enabled us to identify a certain kind of performance, or text, or method of thinking as queer. This is underwritten by a desire to make the processes and investments involved in the definition of queer as transparent as possible. In turn, I hope to evade the creation of an unnecessary and limiting "check list" of qualifiers or standards for queer or queer performance: the effort to determine certain theoretical terms and possibilities should not be taken as the first stage of the construction of a queer canon. This manoeuvre instead allows a degree of separation between various different uses and potential realisations of the word "queer," and the mode of queer I will argue for here.

Inherent to this kind of argument is the potential to read queer's refusal to confirm or conform as a kind of ahistoricism or apoliticism. I intend to argue that where queer does disrupt or refuse those kinds of representation, it does so purposefully. This claim on functionality will make a distinction between simple denial and a more strategic refusal to participate in a dominant paradigm which is seen as erroneous, damaging and disempowering. As this project progresses, a stringent attempt will be made to locate particular performative practices in their political and historical contexts, so as to offer greater potential for an analytic reading of their intentions and functions. The means of doing so will be to read particular case studies of performative practices within the "queer territory" that this introduction seeks to define.

Challenging the Essential Subject

A counter-essentialist reading of sex and gender acts as the foundation to queer thinking and significant work in this theoretical domain persists in feminist, queer, lesbian and gay critical schools of thought. Notable amongst those theorists and

[5] Sedgwick, The Epistemology of the Closet 47.

scholars – and whose writing most directly informs the critical positions outlined in this project – are Eve Kosofky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, whose work has situated the counter-essentialist argument in a variety of different critical and political contexts. With reference to that work, I would first like to suggest the particular theoretical positions that arise when a counter-essentialist reading of the body is applied to the construction of a queer subject.

Criticism of essentialism commonly argues that definitive and universal markers of male and masculine, female and feminine characteristics are arranged in a binary system of absolute opposites that presumptively promote a fantasy of wholeness and fixity. In this particular frame of representation, subjects who do not fit into that system and those who cannot or will not "pass" for normative subjects are disenfranchised. Those who can "pass" do so only by adhering to a narrow dominant system of cultural rules governing the composition of sex and gender, most commonly as the "natural" association of masculinity with the male and femininity with the female to compose symmetrically opposed sexes. This queer challenge to the "natural" demands a recognition of the specific images and values which are involved in the act of "passing" or fulfilling the demands of such a normative symbolic system. This enables a critique of that system and begins to describe the problems involved in an attempt to reform that system.

The first stage of this argument asserts that there should be a meaningful separation of the categories of sex and gender. Here, sex is a term that refers to *biological sex*, a kind of pregiven material upon which the conditions and beliefs of a *culturally defined gender* are enacted. To be male is a biological fact, to be masculine is a matter of cultural circumstance; a person can be born female, but she has to be made a woman. From this, a distinction can be made between a person's sex and the gender roles that have been assigned to him or her: female can be something other than the dominant images assigned to it – domestic, nurturing, reproductive. These images are read as signifiers of femininity, rather than "femaleness." Following this argument a little further, the means for a wider critique become available. If gender is a cultural phenomenon, it is possible to argue that the internally conflicting roles

assigned to men and women act as proof of a cultural paradigm which does not present "fact," but instead limits, controls and reproduces those subjects through a series of specific fantasies. That "woman" can be registered in contradictory fantasies of both physical purity and sexual lasciviousness indicates that neither rendering is sound. There is then the potential for the cross-matching of material sex and cultural gender signifier – given that there is no essential link between male and masculinity, for example, there is no reason why masculinity could not be assumed as an aspect of the female, or femininity of the male.

That stage of a non-essentialist argument is almost immediately problematic. At what point do we distinguish between "cultural fantasy," and that which we are prepared to accept as "material fact"? How easily can those two categories be separated, if at all, given that sex is understood and constructed in the same cultural, symbolic field as gender? One attempt to progress past this apparent impasse – developed in slightly different ways by both Sedgwick and Butler – argues that a separation of sex and gender only acts to serve existing hierarchical binaries. The selection of that which is "natural" and that which is merely "cultural" will be informed by dominant traditions of gender roles which are in themselves inherently cultural. Consequently, both sex and gender can be considered culturally nominated categories. As such, the category of sex is understood from the outset as normative, as what Foucault has called a "regulatory ideal," a practice that produces the bodies that it governs.[6] Foucault's discussion of the interrelation of a subject to centres of power is informative here, in his demand that oppression be considered at the material sites of subjection[7] – that is, instances in which the subject is constituted and limited by specific material, cultural fields. In that sense, "sex" acts as a site of identity claim that promotes unity, solidarity, universality.

However, that unity is qualified: it is a primary illusion of sameness. Within that sameness is the promise of a unified difference – in the simplest terms, all males are the same and that which is different from them is female, who are also, as a group,

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[6] Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex' (New York: Routledge, 1993) 188.
[7] Butler, Bodies That Matter 188-90.

the same. "Difference" exists then only as a proof of the system that produces it. Here, difference exists, but always and only as the same kind of binary difference. Part of this deconstruction of binary difference, therefore, is that our understanding of material sex cannot be of a stable, ahistorical cultural monolith. It is, instead, a historically contingent process that discursively materializes sexed bodies.[8] This process is the product of overlapping images and beliefs in several different systems of signification which are themselves open to change.

In the biological sciences, for example, medical training based on inaccurate observations of dissected female cadavers certainly persisted well into the last century. Beyond that, the given field of what constitutes a male or female body is still far from stable – significant numbers of children are born such that a surgeon has to make a decision on the assignment of sex;[9] the success of reproductive technology has undermined the province of female (and male) bodies as the exclusive precondition of reproduction. The rise of the technology of various cosmetic surgeries (enlargements, reductions, removal of fat from particular body areas, emphasis of certain other sexed signifiers like lips or eyes) and of sex re-assignment adds to the argument that the body a person is born into need not constitute the final proof of "his" or "her" material sex. At the least, the body a person is born into does not present a straightforward guarantee of fixity.

The problem this critique seeks to articulate is not a denial that at a cellular level we can tell the difference between two particular kinds of cells. The problem is that that difference has been manifested as a conceptual binary dualism, as male and female. These are terms which are not somehow "neutral," marked only by the similarly neutral discourses of scientific and biological meaning, but are instead always loaded with culturally contingent signifiers. Cellular proof is not the substance of "sex" – the cultural materialization of those cells is. That cellular proof, or "chromosomal sex," can therefore be read as the relatively minimal raw material on which is based

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[8] Butler, Bodies That Matter 190.

[9] See the Intersex Society of North America's website (<http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency.html>) for discussion of the different forms "intersexuality" can manifest as at birth, and some suggestion of the frequency.

the social construction of sex, merging a biological presence with cultural fantasy and narrative to produce the "natural body."

Certain feminists have protested at the apparent erasure of the female body in this manoeuvre – in reducing all of our terms to contentious and conditional circumstance, the female body and subject (as the primary fantasy of the "natural") is again removed from representation. A response to this apparent impasse might be that the removal of fixed notions of sex does not wholly erase that body but allows the construction of an alternative understanding of how sex might operate that does not reiterate the images and standards of an existing framework. This does not suggest – yet – that some kind of difference in the way we experience our bodies does not exist. Prior to any claim of that order, queer thinking argues for a recognition that sex has yet to be represented or made accessible in any manner that is not a reflection of the dominant fantasies of our culture. Notably, queer theory permits the argument that these fantasies explicitly protect against encounters with the material body, with what psychoanalysis denotes as the Real. Consequently, it becomes a necessary strategy to refute and refuse such dualisms as male/female, as they serve to preserve the notion of minority as "other" and create binary oppositions that leave the "centre" intact.[10] To create a notion of a "female" body without considering this kind of deconstructive logic would be to allow the ontological basis for the fantasies embedded in female and feminine as the absolute other to male and masculine to continue.

Criticism of Julia Kristeva's work in suggesting an alternative, rhythmic semiotic has become caught up in this discussion. Her reference to a pre-natal relationship between mother and child has been read as a retrograde move towards an essentialist and naturalist fantasy of the female body.[11] The rhythmic semiotic is seen as regressive because it promotes an ideal of maternal instinct and a corresponding non-

[10] Arlene Skinner and Ken Plummer, "'I Can't Even Think Straight': 'Queer' Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology," Queer Theory / Sociology, ed. Steven Seidman (Oxford, Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996) 134.

[11] Tina Chanter, "Kristeva's Politics of Change: Tracking Essentialism with the Help of a Sex/Gender Map," Ethics, Politics and Difference In Julia Kristeva's Writing, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York, London: Routledge, 1993) 182.

verbal, anti-intellectual aesthetic. Tina Chanter argues that this critique has stemmed from a misreading of Kristeva and that Kristeva's own assertions that such a semiotic can emerge in music and poetry is the sign of a rather different argument:

> Such complaints disregard Kristeva's own repeated insistence that the semiotic is produced recursively and on the basis of symbolic break. What has not been sufficiently recognised is the extent to which the semiotic is a realm that only acquires meaning – or indeed existence – within the realm of the symbolic.[12]

The symbolic/semiotic distinction is not offered as a mutually exclusive one and an effort must be made not to read that distinction as a conceptual dualism. Chanter argues that semiotic meaning can only emerge retroactively, and in doing so can only be expressed in the terms of the symbolic. That does not mean that the semiotic can be reduced to the symbolic – it instead offers a means of resistance to symbolic expression.[13] This argument is important because it informs how we might go about articulating an alternative to male/female, sex/gender dualisms, particularly when we follow the expansion of that deconstructive work to consider the presumptions encoded in a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy. As this project progresses, it will become apparent that deconstructive performance is marked by the pursuit of a means of interrogating those dichotomies without simply reiterating their terms. Kristeva's semiotic might therefore describe a theoretical methodology of resistance that operates at the point of discursive materialisation.

Part of this programme of deconstruction is the persistent recognition that the "definitional narrowing-down in this century of sexuality as a whole to a binarized calculus of *homo-* or *hetero*-sexuality is a weighty fact but an entirely historical one."[14] Given that, the aim of a queer analysis – or the product of one – is to make clear that history and challenge the rhetorical opposition of what is "transparent" and what is "derivative" or "contrived." A homosexual is not the contrived, or derivative, or unnatural opposite of a heterosexual subject; a heterosexual subject is not the original or natural template for all other sexualities. However, though a response to

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[12] Chanter 184.
[13] Chanter 184.
[14] Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet 31. Emphasis original.

that rhetoric can be stated simply, the field of production for that "binarized calculus" is hugely complex, stretching beyond the singularity of specific speech acts. Part of this project, then, is to consider the particular elements of that discourse that British performance has sought to challenge and rewrite.

Further to this deconstruction, Eve Sedgwick argues that queer thinking emerges in part in as a response to real ambiguities and struggles of "gay / lesbian politics and identities: e.g. there are women-loving women who think of themselves as lesbians but not as gay, and others who think of themselves as gay women but not lesbians."[15] These subjects cross over multiple boundaries of sex, gender and sexual preference: men who identify as straight but enjoy sexual encounters with other men; women who are celibate but self-identify as lesbians. These categories serve to remind of and weaken the connections between sex, gender and particular sexual acts, acts which might have to be considered quite separately from a theory of the body, given that "even identical genital acts can mean very different things to different people."[16] This problematic link between particular acts and the configuration of gender and sexuality is in turn defined by a limit on what constitutes legitimate subjects; that is, those configurations of act, gender and sexuality which are seen as culturally coherent, identifiable and Real, and those which are not. An examination of these structured outcomes provides a guide to intentions (and potential limitations) of both political and performative strategies.

An Incomplete Subject

In particular, non-essentialist accounts of gender, sex and the body raise important questions about the composition of a coherent or stable subjectivity. Most significantly, the role of self-identification in mainstream lesbian and gay politics is problematised and a potential emerges for the distinction between identification and identity to be defined. From the late 1960s and early 1970s, a cohesive gay or lesbian identity was "embraced a part of an emancipatory strategy which could be used for

[15] Sedgwick 17.
[16] Sedgwick 25.

political purposes, including positive legal change for gays and lesbians."[17] The legitimacy of such an identity was primarily defined by an emphasis on public visibility. By "coming out" as gay or lesbian, an individual could join or acquire access to a community of other gay men or lesbians. Individuated, isolated difference from a heterosexist norm in a sexual subject became part of a broader system of difference – the individual was no longer alone, and was able to avail him or herself of the protection and other advantages of a community.

This unproblematised reading of identity politics has been challenged on a number of fronts, through the politicization of internal differences within gay communities, the rise of AIDS and the backlash of the religious and secular right wing.[18] Some of the problems of a simplified identity politics have stemmed from the homogenisation of difference that is described in the male/female dualism – and which in turn occurs in a homosexual/heterosexual dualistic model. For example, the homophobic response to visible communities was the fostering of certain distorted logics, emerging as the notion that all gay men and lesbians are the same, which in the AIDS crisis became the proof of a collective danger or threat of infection. In the tabloid account, AIDS was a disease, some gay men and lesbians had that disease, therefore all gay men and lesbians were carrying that disease. For a time, AIDS became a qualifying marker of gay or lesbian subjectivity in the most damaging sense.

There are undoubted benefits of that "first-wave" emancipatory strategy, benefits that continue to include the creation a variety of support systems, communities of like-minded individuals, legitimated academic and social discourse that can confront institutionalised homophobia. It is not the argument of this discussion to argue that such claims on stable identity are invalid or without use. The case this discussion makes is more problematic, arguing that a flexibility in the practice of identification may be required if we recognise that sexual orientation is neither simply fixed nor constitutively unstable.[19] I would like to argue that as both a theoretical position and

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[17] Lisa Bower, "Queer Problems / Straight Solutions: The Limits of 'Official Recognition'," Playing with Fire, ed. Shane Phelan (London: Routledge, 1997) 267.
[18] Bower 267.
[19] Bower 271.

a political strategy, the stable subject has a limit to its usefulness: the emancipatory urge of that subjectivity is bordered and contained by the circumstances of its creation. The cost of claiming, say, a homosexual identity (or having one claimed for you) must be considered in the terms of a potential loss of employment or other material benefits: there is always pressure to engage the definitive expression of mutability, "passing."[20] There are also social limits to the dynamic of "coming out" which are described in cultural expectations of normativity that are rooted in heterosexism rather than homophobia. Even the most "forthright and fearless gay man or lesbian cannot 'come out' once and for all in a single public disclosure; as she moves from one social setting to another, she will have to come out afresh or acquiesce in assignment to her of a nonreferential public identity."[21] To "circle the wagons" against a homophobic society masks a persisting dominant discourse – that, as Judith Butler argues in Bodies that Matter, what remains outside the subject, set outside by the act of foreclosure which founds the subject, persists as a kind of defining negativity.[22] A heterosexist and potentially homophobic "centre" is left intact.

These kinds of problems suggest a necessary underlying deconstruction of the variety that psychoanalytical criticism offers. Such a critique provides the means to explain or describe a subject who is neither entirely coherent nor self-identical. Psychoanalytic criticism provides further basis for an argument that the pursuit of a cohesive queer identity is undesirable – not least because it may prove impossible. Freud and Lacan's metapsychology acts to provide a "set of foundationalist narratives or political myths … that allows us to come to terms with – in the sense of politically accounting for – the present." It enables a cartography of "points of resistance to dominant formations in the social field as well as in terms of sexual identity."[23] Furthermore, a psychoanalytic approach may also enable an alternative theory of the material body: if sexual "structuring, sexuation or subjectivation, is an

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[20] Bower 271.
[21] Janet Halley, "The Politics of the Closet: Towards Equal Protection for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Identity," Reclaiming Sodom, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (New York, London: Routledge, 1994) 168.
[22] Butler, Bodies That Matter 190.
[23] Rosi Braidotti, "Revisiting Male Thanatica: *Response,*" feminism meets queer theory, eds. Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997) 214.

accumulation of effects that does not accrue to a pre-existing subjectivity or to a primal original materiality of the body, nevertheless the process takes place in and for a *bodily ego.*"[24]

A particularly useful metaphor at this stage is Lacan's narrative of the mirror-stage, which describes a transition from a system of bodily imagery and identification (which is entirely reflexive) into the symbolic system of signification. The mirror-stage is defined by the illusion of wholeness, the complete visual image in the mirror that promises coherence and fixity. On discovering that the image does not hold or fulfil the promise of a whole body, the subject experiences a "quality of lack or indefiniteness"[25] of object. The missing object is sometimes later characterised as the body of the mother, the missing Other. Following this, Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic theory frequently argues that the entry into language is contingent on a subject entering that state of lack.[26] Language – or rather signification – operates as a replacement for that lost object, and provides the means of endless pursuit of surrogates for that object.

If queer thinking proceeds from this reading, it uses it as a stage to support certain claims. First, if the "wholeness" of the body is unreachable, and that lack is the necessitating cause for entry into language, it should follow that all narratives, images and discourses of the material body are subjective, conditional and a form of fantasy. These narratives include sex and gender at a primary level. Secondly, those fantasies are impossible – that is to say that the subject can never reach the object-cause (the 'whole body') – and that they operate rather as an economy of desire, "giving the co-ordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object to locate the position the subject assumes in it."[27] When it is possible to identify a notion of sexuality, it is best understood as a "work in process" of a particular economy of desire. I would suggest that this deconstruction – an argument that desire is not

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[24] Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies 3.2 (1991): 302. Emphasis added.
[25] Grosz 82.
[26] Grosz 82-114.
[27] Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture (Cambridge Mass., London: MIT Press, 1997) 6.

something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – is an essential part of a queer critical approach. It is the psychoanalytical dimension to the disfunction of cultural imperatives and narratives of desire that queer seeks to expose and flaunt.

This critique exposes the fetishistic inversion of interpersonal relationships,[28] those that identify certain people as "gay" or "lesbian," or "bisexual," but also as "male" or "female." This inversion is a further description of the nature of the conceptual dualisms that have been discussed so far – insofar as masculinity depends upon femininity for the limits of its definition. When we argue that heterosexuality defines itself by what it has attempted to cast out and in doing so constitutes homosexuality, then it must also be argued that a stable sense of homosexuality constructed through an emancipatory striving for constructive difference will be in part defined by what it refuses as heterosexual. This interaction considers not only that gender is acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments but that "heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments."[29] This process of heterosexualisation – where particular forms of desire become naturalised as part of a wider cultural matrix – also requires the repudiation of femininity: "[h]e will not identify with her, and he will not desire another man."[30]

What I want to stress here is the interplay between a (performative) subject and the cultural field that receives that subject:

> The subjects think they treat a certain person as a king because he is already in himself a king, while in reality this person is a king only insofar as the subjects treat him as one.[31]

This kind of relation between "performer" and "audience" relates Lacan's description of a closed circuit of desire. There is a kind of narcissistic self-regard,

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[28] Žižek 33.
[29] Carl Miller, States of Desire: Gay Theatre's Hidden History (London, New York: Cassell, 1996) 136-7.
[30] Judith Butler, The Psychic Life of Power (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 137.
[31] Žižek 33.

transferred onto a love object to allow the lover "to love himself, as it were, in loving the other."[32]

The psychoanalytic aspect of this analysis of dualistic systems is particularly important because it indicates the internalisation of those processes. It also leads to a key position in defining a potential queer performer. Moe Meyer argues that "queer identity emerges as self-consciousness of one's gay and lesbian performativity sets in."[33] I believe that this can be amended slightly to suggest that to identify first as gay or lesbian is not a necessary step – and in fact to do so might limit the full potential of a queer identity. Instead, I would argue that it may first be an awareness of one's own performativity marked by a sense of both external and internal difference.

This sense of difference is characterised by knowledge that the subject is founded and continually refounded through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions, constituting a radical discontinuity and incompletion of the subject. Political signifiers, especially those that designate the subject position, are not descriptive. Those signifiers do not represent pregiven constituencies but are empty signs which come to bear phantasmatic investments of various kinds.[34] Terms proffering completeness – like "maleness," or "whiteness" – are only partial discourses that depend on and are limited by other competing discourses. Therefore, the terms that identify a subject do not identify that entire subject; the terms I use reflexively to identify myself do not identify all of me – and when they claim to do so, they engage with a primary fantasy of "wholeness." However, attempts to identity the self completely are persistently marked by failure. This recognition of incompleteness also deconstructs the reflexivity of the self-affirmation involved in self-nomination: I think that being gay or lesbian is a positive thing; I identify as gay or lesbian; my beliefs in the legitimacy of that position are reinforced by my successful occupation of it.

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[32] Žižek 127.
[33] Moe Meyer, "Reclaiming the discourse of Camp," The Politics and Poetics of Camp, ed. Moe Meyer (London: Routledge, 1994) 4.
[34] Butler, Bodies That Matter 191.

Queer Speech

A Lacanian approach has further use through its reading of the multiple discourses of language and power, assisting in the attempt to describe the relation of the subject position to some of those discourses. In particular, the Phallus can be distinguished as the metaphorical signifier of signifiers, to be differentiated from a literal bodily phallus. The Phallus can be the proof of maleness or masculinity – but only when those notions are related to cultural images of authority, dominance and legitimacy. Those "masculine" fantasies do not map directly onto the male body; similarly, fantasies of the "feminine" do not share any fixity with the female body. To have a penis does not guarantee an evasion of lack: it does not guarantee the success of language.[35] In assessing what might constitute access to a subject position – to a speaking position – it is appropriate to consider what is at stake if that subject falls outside of the dominant discourse. Butler argues that to become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms which govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject.[36] A movement outside of the domain of speakability is to therefore risk one's own status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's own speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech. Furthermore, these "intelligible" genders "are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire."[37]

"Impossible speech" would be the "ramblings of the asocial and the ranting of the 'psychotic' that the rules that govern the domain of 'speakability' produces and by which they are continually haunted."[38] Part of the sense of estrangement inherent to a queer subject may be this relationship between what constitutes "speakability" and "unspeakability." The norms that govern the inception of the speaking subject differentiate the subject from the "unspeakable." In doing so, "those norms produce

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[35] Grosz 118.
[36] Judith Butler, Excitable Speech (London: Routledge, 1995) 133-5.
[37] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990) 23.
[38] Butler, Excitable Speech 134.

an 'unspeakability' as the condition of subject formation."[39] Most importantly, that "unspeakability" – read here as a potential queerness – is not excluded but persists as part of the conditions for speech and representation. Given this dynamic, the relationship between a heterosexist centre and non- or anti-heterosexist perimeter might describe how legitimate subjectivities are always bordered by a sense of illegitimacy and "unspeakability." Thus, to identify as gay or lesbian or queer is to approach the edge of what is recognised as legitimate speech, because it is underpinned by an approach to the edge of what is defined as a legitimate subject. Such questions of legitimacy confirm that an attempt to describe a sense of queer performativity necessitates an examination of the kind of (speech) acts that will describe the limits of speakability and its concurrent subject positions. In turn, the mapping of that territory allows us to ask if, when and how "alternative" or counter-hegemonic subjects might emerge.

Butler's work Excitable Speech has set much of the groundwork for feminist and queer analysis of hate-speech, opening that discussion through an interrogation of the terms coined by J.L. Austin in How to do things with words.[40] Austin distinguishes "illocutionary" from "perlocutionary" speech acts: the former are speech acts that, in saying do what they say, and do it in the moment of that saying; the latter are speech acts that produce certain effects as their consequence; by saying something, a certain effect follows.[41] The force of any given utterance depends on its location within a "total speech situation." Butler suggests that as there is no easy way to decide how best to delimit that totality, it is preferable to read that "speech situation" as a ritual moment of condensed historicity. Rather than a momentary act, a speech situation represents a "certain nexus of temporal horizons, the condensation of an iterability that exceeds the moment it occasions."[42] The discursive process of that ritual describes the acquisition of "speakability." The performative power of language becomes tied to its iterative force, re-enacting but not merely copying past acts to exceed the temporal instance of utterance. Significantly, Butler argues that the

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[39] Butler, Excitable Speech 135.
[40] J.L. Austin, How to do things with words (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
[41] Butler, Excitable Speech 13-15.
[42] Butler, Excitable Speech 14.

constitution of a given "total speech situation" is marked by a failure to achieve a totalized form in any of its given instances.

This notion of an integral linguistic failure is useful in describing the disparity between the subject who speaks, and the subject who is constituted by that speech. Speech, or a speaking position, does not guarantee the formation of a stable or legitimate subject. Though the signification of self is "motivated" rather than arbitrary or conventional and artificial,[43] it is still vulnerable to disarticulations of signifier and signified. Part of this faulty circuit of self-signification is that the terms and conditions of one's own proper identity are held in common by others in the community as an effect of the symbolic. Identity is always "dependent upon others of whom a demand for recognition is made – paradoxically, in terms one calls one's own."[44] In the moment of the signifying act, any thetic quality that could definitively establish a transcendental ego is split from the subject.[45] It follows that all subjects are "*passing* through the signifiers which represent them for an other to whom a demand for recognition and a question about being is addressed."[46]

The re-articulation of the term "queer" expresses an attempt to make use of the disjuncture in signification to relocate and redefine the subject that the term denotes. The term "queer" has operated as "one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation."[47] The manoeuvre to reclaim the word as an empowering mode of self-identification takes up and cites the homophobic term to reverse its discursive convention. Instead of a term imposed as abuse, this strategy invokes "queer" as self-nominated valorisation. The iterative force of the former insult is inverted as it is mimed and rendered hyperbolic. However, the structure of this inversion necessitates re-iteration, demands that the original function of abuse be

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[43] See Carole-Ann Tyler, "Passing: Narcissism, Identity and Difference," feminism meets queer theory, eds. Elizabeth Weed and Naomi Schor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997)
[44] Tyler 230.
[45] For further discussion of the split-ego, see Julia Kristeva, "From One Identity to Another," Desire in Language, ed. L. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell 1980).
[46] Tyler 233. Original emphasis.
[47] Butler, Bodies That Matter, 226.

preserved and repeated so that it might be continuously re-directed. For the re-direction of the illocutionary force of a given term to take place, that term must be stated along with the injurious force of its former discourse or speech situation. In the practice of re-signification, the term cannot be totally severed from its homophobic roots: even when used in its most anti-homophobic sense, "queer" depends upon the authorization and iteration of the former situation for its efficacy. The power of the term "queer" stems from the reversal of its status as hate-speech, from the proof that the practice of "shaming through naming" can be inverted.

Teresa de Lauretis draws attention to these conditions of citationality in Butler's work, arguing that the assumption of, or identification with, the categories of sex or of gender in the part of a subject is a reiteration of the symbolic law, but also a performativity that does not preclude agency in subjectification.[48] Queer may instead depend more radically and explicitly on a person undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation[49] than any other category of self-nomination. Such experiments cannot preclude an invocation, however tortuous, of dominant social and cultural signifiers, yet it is the resignification of norms that can be used as a point of entry, by utilising structural inefficacy: the means of "working the weakness in the norm [is through] inhabiting the practices of rearticulation."[50] This relationship between a queer (anti-homophobic) impulse and a (heterosexist, homophobic dominant) hegemonic cultural setting forms the border for action and efficacy of queer performativity; this examination of queer performativity will consider the different modes in which that relationship is negotiated.

Representation and Queer Legal Theory

The study of a tension between queer and hegemonic subjects is dependent on a realisation that the protections offered by certain anti-discriminatory laws and rulings

[48] de Lauretis, 302. Sex and gender are a limited list to which I would add queer when it appears in the sense of a stabilised rallying point and so acquires a normalising function.
[49] Eve Kosofky Sedgwick, Tendencies (London: Routledge, 1994) 9.
[50] Butler, Bodies That Matter 237.

that prohibit discriminatory treatment rely on specific formal and culturally sanctioned modes of identification. Furthermore, these sanctioned forms of recognition operate in a meaningfully different way to the discourses of identity marked by race or sex. The public nomination of sex is typically set at birth; those passing as something other than their birth sex in adult life will be sentenced or administered in the law according to their birth sex. Only within the last five years have rulings in the European Court of Human Rights forced the UK to amend that process to comply with its international obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights. In December of 2002, the Lord Chancellor's office announced the promise of full legal recognition for transsexual people in their "true gender."[51] This has opened the opportunity for transsexuals to amend their birth certificates, and acquire passports issued under their new names and sexes, though the actual practice of "correcting" official documents is still fraught with difficulty.

In the discourse of law, biological sex is assumed as a matter of public knowledge; to a degree the signifiers of race are seen to operate in a similar way. Here, the over-mastery of the visual field pre-signifies the subject – there is "no need" for a Black-British subject to declare him or herself as black as to avail themselves of anti-discriminatory legislation if the colour of their skin has already been taken as proof of the particular kind of subject whose status is protected by those laws. Though there is some variation – for those whose racial signifiers are not so seemingly final or significant as to conclude a racial identity – it is necessary to prove that the party causing injury had nonetheless perceived some part of the subject's composition as racially marked and the motivation for discrimination. This problem of the elision of signifiers leads us towards the problems involved in constructing successful anti-homophobic legislation. Most significantly, it signals how law addressing issues of race might need to be quite different to that which applies to issues of sexual identity. One problem that arises is that there may be no form of non-heterosexual subject before the law who has not been previously identified as a criminal subject in that same body of law.

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[51] See the Press for Change campaign website (<http://www.pfc.org.uk>) for the most recent developments, several since January 2003. A further timeline can be found at <http://www.gaylawnet.com>

This genealogy is visible in the prior criminalisation of certain sexual acts which have in turn been assumed as the substance of non-heterosexual subjectivity. In contrast, there are no particular acts, sexual or otherwise, which the law has denoted as "black acts," or acts which confer non-white racial status. Even though laws criminalising homosexuality have been amended or revoked (legalising homosexuality, changing the age of consent, etc.), the current subject status of homosexuality is the product of its past status as a criminal pathology. That is, the homosexual did not appear in law except as a criminal subject. That stigmatized subject arrived from a genealogy that presupposed the metamorphosis of *the* sodomite into *a* homosexual (c.f. Foucault and Butler) – a link between an *act* (of sodomy) and a particular subject (the male homosexual) which is still being actively negotiated. The case of Bowers vs. Hardwick in the US during 1986 formed a ruling that explicitly fixed on such a configuration of male homosexual identity as inherently defined by particular acts:

> For the supreme court to reach the conclusion that homosexual sodomy was unconstitutional they had to perform a whole scale re-categorization [thereby] wrenching heterosexual identity free from the act of sodomy while making sodomy the equivalent of homosexual identity.[52]

It could be argued that to avail oneself of rulings or laws which might protect a non-heterosexual subject (that is, a subject who does not exclusively self-identify as heterosexual) involves a formal, legally countenanced "coming out." "To borrow the language of semiology, the public status 'heterosexual' is an unmarked signifier, the category to which everyone is presumed to belong. Something has to *happen* to make an individual with the identity homosexual."[53] That "coming out" will always involve entry into the category of subject whose parameters have been set in part by the legislation that defines male homosexuality. What I am trying to suggest here is a perverse kind of masculinist homophobia: that the alternative sexual subject might frequently first be thought of in terms of its relation (or inversion) to the male

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[52] Bower 270.

[53] Paisley Currah, "Politics, Practices, Publics: Identity and Queer Rights," Playing with Fire, ed. Shane Phelan (London: Routledge, 1997) 167-8. Emphasis original.

heterosexual subject. Male homosexuality becomes the hallmark of sexual difference. In the case of the lesbian subject, this is particularly aggravating and confusing as it continues a series of unrelated surrogates and figures of alterity which are taken to be also representing lesbian and gay women. In fact, the lesbian subject appears almost nowhere in the discourse of law; its inclusion in the laws which refer primarily to male homosexuality might – at best – be a misguided attempt at positive, inclusionary tactics. However, those tactics presume that the lesbian subject can be discussed within the terms of male homosexuality without loss of representation and does not consider any political or ontological differences that might exist between lesbian and gay female identifying women – a problem for queer theory to which this thesis will later return.

Identity claims depend on public expression not only for recognition but also in part for their constitution[54] and a court room presents a stage where that claim can acquire formal recognition. The problem arises when the terms of that formal subject status have been created as a response to previous, discriminatory rulings. Following this, we return to the question of whether there can ever be a neutral space authorised by a hegemonic state in which a non-heterosexist subject can be created or re-iterated, whether that alternative subject will always be bound and in part defined in some way by historical discourses of prejudice. What also becomes apparent here is the shift in strategy in the wake of certain test cases. Previously, gay rights activists had more or less argued coherently that homosexuality was a fixed and immutable attribute,[55] such as might define a rigidly demarcated class that could acquire recognition on the same terms as race and sex in equal opportunities legislation. In opposition, the courts had sought to deny protection to homosexuals on the supposed mutability of sexual preference: unlike race, sexual preference did not constitute a stable signifier, or comprise what in American anti-discrimination legislation refers to as a "suspect category." The Bowers vs. Hardwick ruling – as discussed above – collapsed the character of the homosexual subject into a fixed position but only by defining the act of sodomy as the substance of that subject position. Janet Halley argues that at the same time as this enactment of fixity, anti-homosexual

[54] Currah 232.
[55] Halley 148-50.

discrimination actively encouraged a sense of mutability – that despite any claim to an immutable core, non-heterosexual identities could be actively and successfully concealed. Such institutionalised discrimination "ensures that personal desires, sexual behaviour, subjective [private] identity and public identity will frequently get out of sync with each other."[56] The problems of enacting laws describing such subject states draw further attention to the mutability they apparently seek to avoid; for example, how many particular acts of sodomy would it take to legally constitute homosexual status? Categories of men and women who do not practice fellatio, cunnilingus or any sexual act not "involving the sex organs of one person and the mouth or anus of another"[57] would not appear within the remit of the Bowers vs. Hardwick ruling, yet might still identify as gay, lesbian or queer. Those subjects would certainly still experience the culture of discrimination and prejudice that such rulings foster.

The antagonistic relationship between legislative practice and the constitution of identity enables us to make several assertions about the shape of a queer subject, or queer performative practices. Whether queer practices are choices, the result of social construction, or even biologically determined to some degree, queer identities cannot be separated from the practices through which they are produced.[58] In fact, the Bowers vs. Hardwick ruling was overturned on the grounds that homosexuality, "rather than being the equivalent of sodomy, is constituted in precisely the *political process* [...] the courts are pledged to protect."[59] Queer practices might then emerge most clearly as systemic moments of disjuncture within such privileged sites of political action. The opening position of a queer analysis uses this instability to argue against a pre-political, individuated subject. Individuals are instead constituted through discourse, institutions and historical practices; individuals' interests and desires are transformed when they come together in the political sphere; identity is determined with, by projections on and rejections of, the other.[60] The transformation of desires and interests might then be construed in the terms of a new politics of

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[56] Halley 157.
[57] Halley 169.
[58] Currah 232-3.
[59] Halley 149. Emphasis added.
[60] Currah 250.

identity, as a give-and-take process "in which identity is understood both as a *subject* and a *method of political participation.*"[61]

Much of this kind of thinking has arrived through what can now be deemed queer legal studies. Such studies offer a means of identifying the formalised codification of the cultural fantasies invested involved in stable, state-recognised subjects, and also to suggest how queer performativity might construct an alternative mode of formal representation. Paisley Currah, Janet Halley and Cal Stychen have written to demonstrate how legal discourses create norms which universalize particular modes of living, and specific identities and acts, while suppressing other practices and identities which appear deviant or abnormal. In the politics of "official recognition," an argument is made for the inclusion of the lesbian or gay subject in that order of the legitimate, and in doing so assumes that the modern constitutional state or court is the privileged site of political action.[62] The queer critique of this position is that a return to legal categories serves to valorise a conception of identity based on "sameness," requiring us to recognise the "other" as like "ourselves," and activating a view of community as constituted by sure affiliates.[63] Once again, not only is "difference" always the same kind of difference, but it is not that different from the norm after all. Correspondingly, the potential for a critique of the status quo is muted, deferring the position of critical marginality for empowerment through centralised recognition.

The dominance of official recognition might be countered by a radical and subversive deployment of identity, a notion that rests on the "queer possibilities of articulating non-identity."[64] In her paper, "Queer Problems / Straight Solutions: The Limits of 'Official Recognition,'" Lisa Bower presents the possibility of an alternative politics of "direct-address," which redefines the political to include the "everyday enactment of social practices and the routine reiteration of cultural representatives." Beyond being a more directly performative reading of the

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[61] Currah 251. Emphasis added.
[62] Bower 268.
[63] Bower 269.
[64] Bower 269.

construction of any given subject, this strategy also refigures the community so that it does not depend on a regulatory logic of sameness, "emphasising the importance of identification as opposed to identity."[65] This redefinition of subjectivity argues primarily for the importance of patterns of cultural filiation, dependent on reiterative participation, in the place of a model where identity is set by life-long membership of essential, pre-demarcated categories. Concurrently, Butler suggests that individuals who practice similar sorts of sex acts may "have more in common with one another than those who happen to be of the same gender."[66] The differentiation between "official recognition" and "direct address" argued for here depends, I think, upon a quite fluid comprehension of the Foucaultian analysis of subject-to-law relations – that the subject does not appear before the law unless the subject has pre-emptively been registered as legitimate within the law. In the direct-address strategy, the subject has access or address to the law without being comprehensively defined by the law: the legitimacy denoted by access to the law does not definitively constitute a particular subject.

Border Patrol

This introduction has sought to describe some parts of the disfunction apparent in signification of the subject, and argued how those problems are produced systemically within a variety of cultural discourses. This disjunction of the subject occurs both externally, in the relation between performative acts and their "speech situation," and internally, in the terms of an essential lack driving chains of signification that never reach the object of desire. The intention of that manoeuvre has been to attempt to describe the necessary scope of a queer analysis and the territory of critical and political issues that queer performance might address. That analysis will argue a deconstructive effort that will be most effective when that dysfunctionality is pursued along multiple avenues. It also argues that the success of a queer analysis of performance will depend on a reading of subject-relations in a variety of different contexts. This means that the distinctive intimacy of sex and

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[65] Bower 269.
[66] Judith Butler, "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures," Performativity and Belonging, ed. Vicki Bell (London: Sage, 1999) 12.

gender, or gender and sexual preference must be read as significant but not exclusively so. Different kinds of performance and performer will depend upon and be influenced by a divergent field of competing discourses. While it may not be crucial to say which playwrights or performers are or were gay, or to – as in Alan Sinfield's words – "enter into the question of which writing can truly be termed lesbian and gay,"[67] it is necessary to recognise when that question is a product or function of a particular performance.

The intention of defining cultural disjuncture as predominant signifier of a queer theoretical landscape has also been a means of articulating some of the problems in recent practices of identity politics, linking a theoretical approach to a material politics of performance. Those problems directly inform the way in which a performance or performer – whether in a court room or a theatre – is constructed and received, in public and private spaces. That politics of performance will then seek to confront the inherent difficulties of constructing or defining subjects and identities that extend beyond a heterosexual matrix, subjects who do not exist in a temporally or materially stable state. This analysis seeks to identify forms of performance which attempt an account of the diverse system of relationships between particular (sexual) acts and particular subjectivities, recognising both the political strategies of those who identify primarily through a choice of sexual partner, and those who seek to deconstruct the relationship between sexual acts, desire and identity. Queer identities will be shown to emerge in moments of conflict that are marked by a failure of signification, in both over- and under- determination of the subject.

The pervasively deconstructive approach I have described also requires that our understanding of a cultural matrix must be of a network of mutually supportive systems, and, as such, a matrix that is open to critique through a variety of means. That recognition allows us to occupy several positions. It permits us to attempt the creation of alternative, hypothetical subject models to criticise the heterosexist model: to argue that the difficulty in composing a queer subject is in part proof of the inherent instability of a normative "straight" subject. The end result of this process

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[67] Alan Sinfield, Out on stage: lesbian and gay theatre in the twentieth century (New Haven CT, London: Yale University Press, 1999) 3.

need not be the composition of a queer subject – complete or fragmented – but instead to use that critique to demand a wider re-thinking of the terms in which the composition of the subject is keyed into systems of representation. The deconstructive approach allows us to use the dialogues of gender, race and the material body to approach the discussion of queer identities. The deconstructive analysis within this discussion of the debates governing notions of gender, sex and sexuality is then, perhaps, a necessary step in arguing against the definitive legitimacy of a specific discourse or methodology in defining the terms of a queer enquiry.

As the body of growing queer legal and social theory argues, entry into the realm of public representation and legitimate subject-hood is certainly desirable. In the performative case-studies of this project, I will seek to demonstrate how queer performances can operate to re-insert marginalised or entirely unrepresented subjects into dominant cultural discourses. In doing so, I will argue that a public queer presence is necessary for confronting and surviving the material oppressions and crises that have almost become the hallmarks of non-heterosexist subjectivity. However, it is also necessary to move beyond an entry to a public space and to make a demand for a queer subject who exists outside the instance of public disclosure, and exists there without detriment to representation. The wider sense of what this project will attempt to describe is the use of an understanding of queer performativity to gain access to the same kind of status heteronormative subjectivity has as an *unmarked* subject. In seeking representation and legitimacy, this project will also describe queer performance's attempt to construct or rediscover a private space and indeterminacy of subject that cannot be reduced to a state of closetedness. Yet the demand for recognition of a private queer subjectivity is predicated in the production of legitimate public identities, underwritten by a persistent logic that reads a parallel (if not a continuity) between public and private lives even as a separation of "performed subject" and "lived life" is challenged. From the outset, then, this project recognises a tension between the theory and performative practice of queer subjectivity, how deconstructive efforts are staged within the boundaries of existing cultural expectations and conventions.

Chapter 2: Camp theory and camp performance

An examination of camp performativity is particularly useful because its forms and traditions appear to cut across an oppositional matrix of heterosexual and non-heterosexual subjects. Furthermore, a critical reading of camp performance can articulate how that binary relationship serves as foundation for a series of oppositional characteristics: "original" versus "copy," "transparent" versus "hidden" and "artificial" versus "natural."

Though a cultural and historical relationship between the imagery of camp and particular sexual identities can be identified, this discussion of that association will resist a strict genealogy that defines, for example, camp as the exclusive domain of male homosexuality. In attempting to understand the strong relationship between male homosexuality and camp, I want to suggest which other subject positions might be created or elided. To that end, camp performance will be read in terms of a queer response to real ambiguities and contra-indications of identity – to suggest how the notion of identity through performance might differ from an understanding of identity centred on the material body. The role of a queer analysis of camp performance, therefore, might be to articulate and challenge the connections between sex, gender and particular sexual identities. In turn, this informs an analytical approach to the notion of a non-essentialist subject, whose subjectivity is marked by a series of shifting relationships to various discourses of representation. That criticism will also begin to describe the relationship of potentially radical performances to normative categories of identity, in particular the structure of parody and reinforcement that exists between camp subjects and dominant images of masculine and feminine identity in a heteronormative culture. This analysis will draw on Judith Butler's theoretical positioning of drag as model of queer performance to argue the case for camp as a permanently problematic performativity.

Such an argument problematises the relationship between professional camp performers (those who assume camp roles or identities as part of their work as entertainers, actors, etc.) and the audiences that receive them, recognising that the wish for one's own terms and one's proper identity, "perhaps the most deeply private

property, is an impossible desire since both are held in common in others in the community as an effect of the symbolic."[68] A camp model of performativity, then, can be used to argue the queer position that a construction of difference (and identity) is always caught up in a kind of mirroring situation: I know who I am by seeing what I am and what I am not. This recognition of a reciprocal relationship directs critical attention to what meaningful difference might exist between a homosexual actor playing a camp role and a heterosexual actor playing a camp role, examining a contrast between playing camp and being camp.

"Notes on Camp"

Contrary to realist or naturalist representation, Susan Sontag makes the claim that "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[69] Unlike conventions which might seek to conceal or diminish their own artifice, Sontag describes camp as a signifying practice which draws attention to its own selective emphasises. From this, it could be argued that camp might emerge as a form of performance whose primary convention is to draw attention to its own performative conventions. However, Sontag reads camp primarily as a *quality* of an object or person – as an aesthetic rather than as a performative act. Sontag refers to a performative form, "camping," as only a kind of derivative of a camp aesthetic, somehow "less satisfying." However, though Sontag does not directly address a performative function of camp as productive of identity, she argues that to perceive camp "in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role." Here, camp is an identity which might be assumed as a role in performance, as much as a mask or a costume. Significantly, Sontag's camp manifests as the quality of a pregiven object or subject, an aesthetic that operates within the field of previously defined, culturally arbitrated values. Camp is an additional quality to an identity that has already been produced. These seeming inconsistencies pose several problems for a queer theorist seeking to construct a sense of a queer performative from Sontag's

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[68] Tyler 230.
[69] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," Against Interpretation and other essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967) 53.

definition of camp, not in the seemingly counter-radical assertion that "[i]t goes without saying that the Camp is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical."[70]

This declaration of political disinterest depends on a very narrow reading of what might constitute political activity; if a camp aesthetic does not emerge autonomously but arrives as a quality of pregiven subjects or objects then there is a relational field whereby camp challenges and/or reiterates the original field of signification. Such a similarly specific definition of camp's political potential might complement Sontag's reading of camp as an essentially comic view. Yet rather than reading comedy as an experience marked by detachment or apoliticism, camp's reproduction of dominant heterosexist imagery could act as a form of parody. A camp performative can be described through a kind of an abrasive relationship to hegemonic values, a relationship that prevents it from being apolitical. Rather than operating separately from or outside of a dominant discourse, camp's function is akin to that of pastiche and satire. Sontag's criticism of camp's apoliticism on generic grounds is problematic, and does not quite correlate with her later assertion that "[t]he whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious,"[71] which would suggest a certain potential or functionality for comedy. Such potential could emerge in a perceived comic excess that goes beyond a perceived ineffectiveness of other, institutionalised forms of critique.

"Notes on Camp," written before the development of theory that might call itself queer, is perhaps understandably involved in the categories of identity that queer theory seeks to deconstruct. It can be argued that Sontag's analysis is based upon a male/female, masculine/feminine dichotomy: "What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine."[72] However, this observation does draw attention to the tension in camp performance between sex and gender roles and the functional use camp performers make from realigning the expectations connected to those roles. Similarly, Sontag's further observation that "[a]ll Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of

[70] Sontag, "Notes On Camp" 54.
[71] Sontag, "Notes On Camp" 62.
[72] Sontag, "Notes On Camp" 56.

artifice"[73] allows us to begin a queer critical position that perceives camp's excess – rather than being uniquely propagated – as a progression from the already polarised representations of value and gender role. Camp then becomes the heightened display of the artifice involved in the construction of all identities.

Sontag describes her work as in "the form of jottings rather than an essay," disavowing any claim to a traditional, linear argument, intending perhaps a form of writing which – in pursuing "this particular fugitive sensibility" – takes on the speculative and playful idiom of camp. Sontag is aware that in writing about camp she may not be able to avoid evoking some of its performative qualities: "It's embarrassing to be solemn and treatise-like about Camp. One runs the risk of having, oneself, produced a very inferior piece of Camp."[74] From this we can draw a queer perspective on signification, such that roles and identity categories that we take to be fixed are instead on the precipice of being misinterpreted, on the edge of under- or over-determination. Camp may operate to draw attention to these border territories of signification which are continually renegotiated to produce the image of stability. Mark Booth develops Sontag's definitions to suggests that camp demonstrates a sense of liminality, a performative shaped by specific forms of conduct.[75] This analysis of conduct draws upon the anthropological meaning of liminality as a temporary state during a rite of passage when the participant lacks social status or rank – here, a subject acquires a public persona through the ritual of camp performance. Camp therefore should not be understood as an expression of pure performative alterity but something that depends upon and is built from that which is recognised as culturally legitimate. The quality of "performative otherness" of camp might depend upon the audience recognising the images of the dominant cultural order and becoming aware that they have been subverted.

Crucially, the images involved in the production of camp – both when a performer seeks to construct a camp performance and when an audience recognises a camp

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[73] Sontag, "Notes On Camp" 55.
[74] Sontag, "Notes On Camp" 54.
[75] Mark Booth, "Campe-toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp," in Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject; a reader, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

performance – are those which are for the most part easily recognisable. While camp draws upon the marginal, that sense of marginality should not be confused with obscurity. If the heterosexual, masculine subject is assumed to occupy the central reference point of cultural significance – as is the central assertion of much feminist psychoanalytic and cultural scholarship – all other subjects must be read from their relative, marginal positions. Yet this marginality does not necessarily denote a limit to cultural circulation; a structural liminality does not necessarily invoke invisibility but rather describes where and how camp performance might be received. This, in turn, does not simply provide a description of limitations but offers the ground on which a radical or counter-hegemonic impulse might be located. To that end, later discussion of British camp performance – specifically of the radio series Round the Horne and the anti-language polari – will demonstrate the highly visible and widely accessible positions that camp has occupied in popular culture.

There is, however, a tension between the judgement of camp to be marginal or altern and the selective emphasis within camp performance of that which occupies a notional centre. Mark Booth develops his argument to suggest that to "be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits."[76] Camp performances' mode of parody might then appear to operate through the re-ordering of images and values in a dominant cultural symbolic order through the means of exaggerated display.

Camp as Radical Parody

In "Merely Cultural," Judith Butler argues that successful parody "requires a certain ability to identify, approximate and draw [the subject of parody] near."[77] Successful criticism through parody would appear to be dependent on involvement with the subject of that parody. If camp is to be read as a form of parody, images of hetero-normative cultural life can never be fully disavowed:

[76] Booth 69.
[77] Judith Butler, "Merely Cultural," Social Text 52.3 (Autumn – Winter 1997): 266.

> It is, I would argue, impossible to perform a convincing parody of an intellectual position without having a prior affiliation with what one parodies, without having and wanting an intimacy with the position one takes in or on as the object of parody.[78]

This involvement – this sense of affiliation – echoes the formal sense of the word parody. The word parody itself originates from the Greek word *para*, meaning beside, alongside, from the side of, and *ode*, meaning song. The first parodies "were literally songs sung beside the principal ones delivered by the rhapsodists; adjunct offerings, in other words, which stood the principal songs upside down with grotesque [...] counterparts."[79] Instead of suggesting a position of critical distance, Butler's corresponding reading of parody describes a kind of critical involvement, dependent as camp and parody are on a

> performativity of the subject such that the audience or the reader does not quite know where it is you stand, whether you have gone over to the other side, whether you remain on your side, *whether you can rehearse that other position without falling prey to it in the midst of the performance.*[80]

This represents a central issue for the analysis of camp performativity, in that parodic, performative critique of a given set of cultural values is as likely to "contaminate" the performer with those values as the performer is able to unsettle those of the audience. Moe Meyer elides this problem by creating a radical queer camp that redefines all other forms of camp that have preceded it. In his introduction to the anthology The Politics and Poetics of Camp entitled "Reclaiming the discourse of Camp," Meyer argues that camp must be recognised as "solely a queer (and/or sometimes gay and lesbian) discourse":

> Additionally, because Camp is defined as a solely queer discourse, all un-queer activities that have been previously accepted as "camp" [...] have been redefined as examples of the appropriation of queer praxis.[81]

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[78] Butler, "Merely Cultural," 265.
[79] G.D Kiremidjian, "The Aesthetics of Parody," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 28.2 (Winter 1969): 232.
[80] Butler, "Merely Cultural," 266. Emphasis added.
[81] Meyer 1.

A significant problem with Meyer's theoretical revisionism is that the move would appear to detach the practices of camp from the cultural circumstances that define what constitutes "camp." Such a move reduces the historical contexts that define camp's relationship to other performance practices, and refuses any tradition between camp and non-homosexual subjects – unless Meyer's category of queer includes certain subjects who previously identified as heterosexual but whose camp performances have given them "honorary queer" status, despite the fact that those performers might not identify as queer or indeed anything other than heterosexual. Meyer's appropriation of camp to identify a form of queer sexuality "whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from participation in those performances"[82] also suggests (contrary to Butler and Sedgwick) that identities can be acquired or resisted as easily as a costume or mask. Meyer's queer social identity appears to operate fully under the agency of the subject, determined singularly rather than in negotiation. Meyer's most interesting suggestion is that queer identity emerges as "self-consciousness of one's gay and lesbian performativity sets in."[83] It does not follow, however, that such self-consciousness defers control over the performativity of identity.

Meyer's reading of the 1991 Chicago Mayoral election candidate Joan Jett Blakk, the "first official Queer Nation candidate for municipal office," draws further attention to the problem of straightforwardly minimising the political potential of camp:

> Assimilationist gays – many in editorial positions – were especially dismayed by Blakk's campaign strategy, one based on the practice of camp. Taken for granted to be apolitical, Camp was deemed flippant and demeaning as the foundation for a campaign [...] if Camp is apolitical, why was it appearing in an overtly political and activist situation? Second, if Camp, generally defined, is merely an aestheticized sensibility characterized by triviality and lack of content [...] then why did it so clearly divide gay political opinion, and in such a strongly articulated way?[84]

I would respond to Meyer's second question by arguing, as I have already suggested, that camp's involvement with that which it parodies (that involvement being part of

[82] Meyer 3.
[83] Meyer 4.
[84] Meyer 6.

what enables camp to be political) is sometimes what renders it "demeaning" and so problematic for assimilationist activists. Queer Nation's use of camp tactics alongside other campaign strategies (formal press releases, registering Blakk as an official candidate) would suggest that camp might be one of several available strategies, one that is not uniquely or "purely" queer but one that draws its strengths from the disjuncture that it produces in the context of other, regularised forms of political action. While this kind of argument produces a largely positive reading of camp, insofar as there is always a potential for parodic or satirical deconstruction of gender role, it does elide the problems that surround the propagation of those images and roles. Camp performers might be as informed by a heterosexist performative tradition than by any alternative, radical queer culture. This problematic relationship between the central and the liminal forms a central part of any political functionality that might be claimed for camp.

Performing Homophobia

If camp is to be read as a construct of the marginal, the primary form of the marginal in a heterosexist symbolic economy is the feminine female which camp parades in an exhibition of stylised effeminacy. This presents several issues: a reading of the homosexual male as an etiolated, feminised version of the heterosexual male, which in turn simultaneously reinforces women as the weakened secondary version of the heterosexual male. Gay men's radical drag, a deliberate gender bending, could "easily be seen, rightly or wrongly, as degrading to women."[85]

Tim Edwards identifies camp as a product of two image cults that emerged with the formation of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, groups that sought to establish identities through the distortion of established gender norms and the appropriation of stereotypical representation. One group he identifies are "masculinists," or proponents of "gay male machismo" – who confronted the negative stereotype of homosexual effeminacy through exaggerated visual signifiers of masculinity: muscles, leather, moustaches, motorbikes. In contrast, Edwards'

[85] Tim Edwards, Erotics and Politics (London, New York: Routledge, 1994) 35.

second group are "effeminists" – who "sought to denounce and drop all displays of traditional or stereotypical masculinity completely," choosing behaviours and dress to refute a presumptive heterosexual masculinity.[86] Both strategies invoke expectations of gendered identities in order to challenge normative, essentialised relationships not only between perceptions of sex and gender, but between sex and sexuality. In doing so, these strategies also relate to the homophobic situation where gay men and women are being told to behave as normative men and women, while simultaneously being told that their sexuality means they cannot be recognised as "proper" men and women:

> Gay men and lesbians are oppressed primarily for being the "wrong kind of men" (effeminate, fearful and anti-family) and the "wrong kind of women" (overly aggressive, assertive and argumentative) respectively. Consequently, misogyny and homophobia become the start of the same problem.[87]

Both masculinists and effeminists flaunt the artificial and culturally acquired qualities that are traditionally held as "natural" proof of subject status.

However, such camp performatives are still part of the (re)production of homophobia. Correspondingly, Ki Namaste's Derridean critique argues "that heterosexuality needs homosexuality for its own definition: a macho homophobic male can define himself as 'straight' only in opposition to that which he is not – an effeminate gay man."[88] Homosexuality, figured in the heightened performance of camp, is not excluded from such homophobia; it is integral to its very assertion. This kind of relationship of camp to non-camp performances may express a further consequence of liminality – in which a subject acquires identity through ritualised figurings – to suggest that camp performatives enforce the presence of the closet:

> Although the adoption of homosexual identity allows for the guarantee of civil rights, it [brings] with it the notion of the closet – that is, the idea that some people are "visible" about their sexualities while others remain silent.

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[86] Edwards 46.
[87] Edwards 42.
[88] Ki Namaste, "The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Postructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality," Sociological Theory 12.2 (July 1994): 222.

> In other words, the emergence of homosexuality was accompanied by its disappearance.[89]

The use of camp to declare oneself to be out of the closet "marks non-heterosexuals who are presumably *inside*." Namaste's paper "The Politics of Inside/Out" argues that this is a key problem: in efforts "to define a sexual identity *outside* the norm, one needs first to place oneself *inside* dominant definitions of sexuality." That play between inside and outside, presence and absence becomes the "*condition* of interpretation, insofar as each term depends on the other for its meaning."[90]

The modes of exaggeration involved in producing camp performances might be said to reinforce this visible/invisible decision, presenting a highly marked image into which non-heterosexual identities can be collapsed. In order for camp to do any radical or deconstructive work it must first appear within a retrogressive context: the potential subversions in camp might always manifest in heavily regulated images and definitions of subjectivity. Though camp parodies the tradition of femininity through the "exhibition of stylised effeminacy,"[91] any deconstruction of a fixed notion of femininity could only ever be partial, retaining the idea for its own continued practice – for a parody to impact, it must retain the object of its parody in some form.

This may explain some of the uncertainty that surrounds the relationship between camp and male homosexuality and signals that the most interesting studies of camp might be of individuals in camp roles or performances who are neither male nor homosexual. The relationship between camp and the female subject is extremely problematic, particularly when we attempt the kind of queer-realignment practiced by Meyer. Biddy Martin argues that anti-foundationalist celebrations of queerness "rely on their own projections of fixity, constraint, or subjection onto a fixed ground, often onto feminism or the female body."[92] Even when camp does not directly reference that body, it creates a relationship to something called the feminine (and

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[89] Namaste 224.
[90] Namaste 224. Emphasis original.
[91] Booth 69.
[92] Biddy Martin, "Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias," Diacritics 24.2-3 (Spring 1994): 104.

potentially the masculine) that can be "played straight." This celebration of evasiveness invokes "a tendency to assume that when [the body] is not camped up or disavowed, it constitutes a capitulation, a swamp, something maternal, ensnared and ensnaring."[93]

The question then becomes if it is possible for camp to operate from a starting point of femininity – that is to say, can camp operate without a presumptive masculinity against which certain parodic and stylised moues are positioned? Is there such a thing as femme-camp? If camp works primarily by performing (to various degrees of sophistication) the signifiers of femininity, femme-camp would only be an exaggeration of potentially misogynist stereotypes of a female subject. Martin presents the intriguing observation that the situation whereby "the femme may pass implies the possibility of denaturalizing heterosexuality by emphasizing the permeabilities of gay/straight boundaries."[94] It is also questionable as to whether the female subject position is endowed with the kind of flexibility and relative permission to re-create itself that the masculine subject claims. Too often, "anti-deterministic accounts that challenge feminist norms depend on the visible difference represented by cross-gender identification to represent the mobility and differentiation that 'the feminine' and 'the femme' supposedly cannot."[95] This may mean that female subjects might access a kind of camp by playing butch – fulfilling the visible act of cross-identification. It is, though, questionable as to whether this would represent camp in the same sense as that authored by male performers.

Butch role-play may have a relationship to lesbianism that could mirror the relationship of male homosexuality to camp role-play, but this would indicate two separate systems of signification, rather than adjunct version of the same notion of camp. If camp is to be considered a form of parody – which does not remove the possibility that someone might live a perfectly serious, if camp, life – it involves a sense of reflexive playfulness: look at what I claim to be whilst showing what I am not. Camp role-play appears to revel in the precariousness of essentialised identities

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[93] Martin 105.
[94] Martin 113.
[95] Martin 105.

and becomes an exercise in demonstrating power over self-image, a performance that never successfully re-signifies a subject but instead draws value from showing how far the binary separation of normative definitions can be stretched. It is unclear, though, if butch-lesbian identities act in a similar way and should be described as part of camp performativity. If identification with butch identities is a similar display of self-nomination, does it begin from a presumptive position of powerlessness? Does "playing" butch (to mimic the power-role of masculinity) mean that the performer must have previously been something other than butch? Does playing "butch" invoke the powerlessness of "femme" subjects? The problem inherent in this kind of power-play is that signification of agency is framed as masculinity. The pregiven subject that can take on and cast off primarily feminine signifiers in camp performance relies upon a contrast, or relief, between the performed and the "original." Here, that originality is masculine – empowered as such to take on certain roles and images, even those marked by femininity, without any threat to his authority; that subject can return to his position of masculine authority because femininity can be taken on and cast off easily. That which approximates femininity is impermanent, unlike the presumptive fixity of masculinity.

In this reading, camp acts as a function of masculinity that reiterates relationships of power and authority over non-masculine subjects. It may be appropriate to consider sexual identity as a secondary effect of signification for camp performativity; critically, the central quality of camp is that it begins through the reiteration of masculine subject-position authority. Biddy Martin acknowledges Carol-Ann Tyler's logic that:

> lesbians' efforts to make butch-femme roles into parodic resignifications of heterosexual norms paradoxically reinforce the assumption "that the 'authentic' or 'natural' self is heterosexual", even as it inverts the hierarchy by proclaiming the "fake" or artificial gay self to be the "better," smarter – more smartly dressed – self, which deconstructs itself by knowing its difference from itself and the gender role it only assumes like a costume.[96]

[96] Martin 112.

It is also important to recognise that "role-play" and "playing" butch or camp may describe only part of a wide span of identity practices that are not deliberately staged or theatrical and instead form a component of continuous, daily public identities. To assume a structural separation or performative binary between public camp performances and private, psychic identities is restrictive; it presumes that camp is always deliberately and consciously performed, and the images produced in those performances have a stable relationship to a similarly stable original subject. Such a move also presumes that a camp performative or aesthetic can be reduced to a simple series of gestures or criteria, and that camp and "not-camp" identities function as a binary pair.

The form of parody involved in camp does appear to invoke a series of perceptual binary oppositions, yet does so to expose and manipulate an over-reliance on certain visual and aural signifiers that operate as proof of pregiven sexual identities. However, this critical positioning need not result in an "evacuation of interiority, too total a collapse of the boundaries between public and private, and too exclusive an understanding of psychic life as the effect of normalization."[97] If camp is queer, it enforces the notion that multiple identities – sometimes discrete, sometimes intertwined – can exist within a single subject. We can recognise that these identities are defined by context and often very specific codes of ritual dress and other behaviour, which allows a person to be camp, an insurance salesman and a practicing Catholic.

This positioning also permits a more functional critique of camp as a dominant stereotype of homosexuality: in particular, the opportunity to recognise that the claim that camp performance's potentially stereotypical and damaging images of gay men is not immediately mirrored in camp's treatment of gay women. Where as the homophobic response to camp male subjects is that they are lesser, effeminate men (because they are like women), the response to butch women is that they are not women at all. Rather than representing etiolated versions of femininity, the presence of masculine signifiers here denotes sexlessness. Having no "default" maleness from

[97] Martin 106.

which to proceed to the temporary adoption of alternative roles, masculine women defy and thus approach the normative boundaries of legitimate subjects. Furthermore, the focus on camp as a function of male identity might also be read as an argument that butch women do not present the same kind of cultural threat. Feminine men are dangerous precisely because they are men; masculine women, having no claim to the originality of the male subject position, are an aberration but not a threat to stability because their status as women is already a derivative of a presumptive universal male subject.

The relationship of gay subjects to a presumptive male heterosexuality is further expressed in the homophobic notion that gay men cannot help but act camp. Here camp is not a knowing aesthetic or deliberately invoked performative, but the logic that camp subjects lack the control or restraint of masculine men. This notion that gay subjects systematically lack control over the production of self-image (such as is endowed in heterosexual subjects) is expressed in terms of successfully refuting the Other, the feminine. The security and stability of the masculine subject is defined in part by a capacity to refuse the Other, figured both as the female and homosexual. This situation produces a double-bind for the non-heterosexual subject: that subject is inferior because he or she behaves in a certain way but also because (as he or she is so inferior) he or she cannot control or change that behaviour. This situation might lead to a specific, functional demand of camp's potential. Can the overstated artifice of a camp identity throw into relief the regularised artifice involved in the production of heterosexual identity, deconstructing the opposition between intentional artifice and a "natural state"?

Given that this discussion has not attempted to separate any kind of public, audience-focussed public camp from a private self-oriented camp, it is productive to suggest a tension or directional emphasis between "I play camp therefore I am camp" and "I am camp therefore I play camp." If homophobic assertions are to be resisted, camp performativity has to be read within a wide spectrum, from a performance taken on by subjects who regard it as a secondary or contrasting role to their "resting" identity, and those whose camp performativity is part of their core identity. I intentionally do

not want to separate these positions into "performance" versus "performativity" as this would suggest a binarism that is unhelpful in describing the relationship between these ideas. To do so would be to return to the kind of rigid structural politics of identity that this discussion seeks to evade.

Evasive Subjects

Before moving to a specific discussion of camp performativity in practice – primarily through a discussion of Round the Horne, and of the role that counter-hegemonic forms might play within mainstream, even normative performances – I want to suggest the potential benefits of reading camp as a form of parody. Though to read camp as parody might re-instate a relationship between original and copy, an articulation of that relationship can be explored without returning to binarism. One productive method is to draw a parallel to Lacan's psychoanalytic analysis of object relations; that is, the relationship(s) between a subject and the notions of need, demand and desire. This kind of criticism also allows an alternative articulation of the connection between speech and sexuality – to develop an alternative and potentially more complex reading of the acts of self-nomination apparent in queer performance. In turn, a psychoanalytical approach indicates the fallibility of a definitive distinction (however seemingly useful) between performance and performativity. The relational systems described in Lacanian analysis indicate a kind of connection between a performed, parodic "copy" and the "original" on which that performance is based that operates without necessarily distributing greater cultural value to one category or the other. It is appropriate at this point to note the specific inflection psychoanalysis places on certain terms, particularly as several of these terms have previously been used in slightly different contexts.

The Lacanian notion of sexuality is radically different from everyday concepts of

> feelings, attitudes, emotions, performance, orgasmic intensity, etc. (although these may play some role in its functioning). [...] It deals only with speech, the analysand's discourse, and the demands and desires this discourse articulates. The sexuality about which the analysand talks is in fact the sexuality or desire manifested by and hidden in language. Psychoanalysis

> functions to restore the analysand to his or her desire, which lies unacknowledged within his or her demands.[98]

Elizabeth Grosz's book, Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction, makes explicit the predominance of the linguistic field in psychoanalysis. This dominance should be registered as more than an emphasis on language or particular speech-acts, but the assertion of speech as the medium by which all action is ultimately rendered social and comprehensible. Even in the presence of physical action, language persists as the mode in which that action is perceived and comprehended. This primacy stems from the metaphorical narrative of "fort" and "da" ("gone" and "here"). Alone in his cot, an infant throws away and draws back a cotton reel, his actions read as the child's attempt to "control the mother's presence and absence through language, substituting a linguistic relation, which it may control, for the mother's presences and absences, which it does not control."[99]

Language operates as the primary substitution that allows the subject to move from the asocial experience of the body into a system of cultural signification. Grosz characterises this substitution as marked by the simultaneous transformation of biological needs (for example hunger) that can be satiated, into demand which cannot:

> Language is substituted for the satisfaction of need, which is consequently transformed into demand. It has become fundamentally insatiable [...] In Lacan's understanding, the demand is always transitive for it is always directed to an other (usually the mother). By being articulated in language, a language derived and learned from the (m)other, demand is always tied to otherness.[100]

The entry into language is contingent on the abandonment of the originating body, both in the sense of the body of the child and the body of the mother. The artifice of language then takes precedence over what Lacan characterises as the "natural cry" of the child. The rejection of the body is incomplete, insofar as it persists to be articulated through an alien system of symbolic signification – describing the state of

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[98] Elizabeth Grosz, Jacques Lacan – A Feminist Introduction (New York: Routledge, 1995) 59.
[99] Grosz 60-1.
[100] Grosz 61.

primary alienation both Freud and Lacan describe as an inherent aspect of subjectivity. The entry to language then acts as a surrogate system of signification that promises control – not over the mother's presence and absence, but over a series of replacements. That promise is predicated by the presence of the other to which language is addressed:

> Demand is able to borrow the forms of instinctual need because of its fundamental ambiguity: demand always has two objects, one spoken, the other unspoken: the object or thing demanded (this or that object), and the other to whom the demand is ostensibly addressed.[101]

Through reference to this theoretical territory, it is possible to describe a structural similarity between the forms described for demand and desire, and the relationship between a parody and the "original" object of that parody. Parody does not eliminate or consume its object; the connection is continuous and reiterative, it is not "satisfied." Parody may present, then, the archetypal pursuit of the unattainable:

> Where need aims at an object which satisfied it, demand appeals to an other in such a way that even if the demanded object is given, there can be no satisfaction. This is because the demand is really for something else, for the next thing the other can give, for the thing that will 'prove' the other's love.[102]

Demand's fixation on a given object obfuscates the process within – that it is the "giving" of the object that is crucial, that only the act of "giving" can operate as a proof of the other's love. This may describe the relationship between parody (which is read as primarily critical) and pastiche (which assumes a form of flattery). Can parody be read as a form of attempt to prove "love" for the original? Lacan denotes this pursuit of proof of an other's love as "desire," a drive that manifests as "wanting to have the object (of desire)" and "wanting to be the object (of desire)." This position provides a problematic interrelation of parody and identification. Do we identify with objects that are loved? The logic here is that if we are more like object "x," we are capable of being loved. Such identification may define if we are capable of "loving" at all – as becoming the object of desire acts as a proof of subject status.

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[101] Grosz 61.
[102] Grosz 61.

This reading focuses primarily on an attempt to assume the object position (to be the object); as has been suggested, the notion of desire is also defined by the relationship to another other. That desire "can be satisfied only by one 'thing' – another(s) desire. Each self-conscious subject desires the desire of the other as its object."[103] How does this sense of reciprocity relate to the performance of cross-gender identifying roles? Is the performer playing out the image of his or her own desire – and in doing so internalising the process by which the performer becomes the object of another's desire? To do so would be to introduces another level of parody wherein the relational aspect of desire – where desire is directed – is inverted.

Unconscious Desires and Conscious Performances

At this point I want to reiterate the notion of parody as a critical force and to recognise the contradiction of parody as a form of cultural identification and reproduction which simultaneously attempts a critical deconstruction. Gender parody – which I will define loosely here as camp performative practices that are manifestly critical of the gender roles they portray – may be most able to explicate this problem. If parody mimics the underlying structure of the object relations of desire, the object of desire in gender parody may be the archetypes of masculinity and femininity, archetypes in their most essentialist form. These roles are objects of desire in both senses – they are the thing we want and the thing we want to be. Gender parody might then redirect our attention to the relentlessness of this pursuit, a pursuit that, as a formulation of desire, is functionally impossible to resolve.

If the insatiable quality of desire is attributed to the pursuit of fixed gender identities, a critique based in a queer performativity becomes possible. The reiterative quality of the relentless drive for fixed identity suggests something of the need to continually reiterate or re-perform one's own identity. A subject cannot reach a position of fixed or stable identity, particularly not an immutable state of masculinity or femininity; instead, he or she can only enter into repeated performances that simulate

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[103] Grosz 64.

progression toward such an identity. The ultimate object position of that pursuit remains unattainable. There is here the sense, then, of a return to a central queer notion of all identity as performative – where perhaps the "success" of that performativity is its transparency when held up for interrogation alongside the social laws and values of a culture. A masculine man is only seen as masculine in the degree to which he fulfils the signifying field's definition of masculinity. All gender identities then act within various bounded levels of success that mark legitimacy and coherence; no-one can access the absolute or perfect definition of what it is to be a "true" man or woman. Instead, subjectivities which are thought legitimate only enjoy proximity or resemblance to those archetypes. Parody – particularly parody of gender roles – can act to expose the relentlessness and essentially unfulfilled pursuit of a secure identity as a "man" or "woman." Parody can act to inflate the characteristics which become objects of fixation in the pursuit of a social identity – codes of dress and behaviour, bodily form and sexual preference.

The central problem with this kind of experimental association of psychoanalytic forms and performative subjectivity is that Lacanian and Freudian analysis both argue that the conscious mind does not register the true relationships of desire. Care must be taken about the kind of claims that can be made about the relationship between psychoanalytic structures and performative practices. Formally, any true insight into the desires of the analysand always relies upon the intercession of the analyst:

> like demand, [desire] preserves an absolute or unconditional element and an orientation towards the other. In opposition to demand (and in accordance with need), desire is beyond conscious articulation, for it is barred or repressed from articulation.[104]

While the object relations of desire might share some similarity with the relationship between parodic performance and the cultural object of that parody, a distinction needs to be made between desire's pursuit of culturally recognisable objects and the motivation of desire.

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[104] Grosz 64-5.

> [Desire] cares little for social approval or the rewards and punishments consciousness offers to demand. Desire is concerned only with its own processes, pleasures and internal logic, a logic of the signifier. While such a logic can support social laws and values, it is also able to subvert or betray them, based as it is on expelled, socially inappropriate, repressed wishes.[105]

There is then a question of how, if at all, the social aspect of parody relates to the internal logic of desire – a relationship that might be best described as one based on mimicry of an underlying structure, a kind of metonymic relationship. Such mimicry is the product of a shared system of cultural signification that defines the symbolic field (language) in which both demand and desire, and the performance of parody, are articulated.

However, whereas parody may be structurally determined by the images and forms of regulated social laws and values, Lacan argues that true desire has its own independent processes of pleasure and logic which are unbound by social considerations. Desire, as Grosz argues, can both support and subvert "social laws and values," but unlike parody it need not automatically or reflexively invoke those structures. Social laws and values may indicate potential forms that the object of desire may take but do not do so exclusively. Crucially, desire can ignore the promise of social approval and the threat of social punishment in the pursuit of its object. Desire's borders are instead moderated internally, through the function of the super-ego that serves to maintain specific taboos, taboos in the Freudian sense of parental cultural prohibition. Though this structure describes a struggle between the voracious demands of the id and the cultural policing of the super-ego, those demands do not in themselves re-enact a prior structure of power and representation. However, camp as parodic performance involves some register of conscious performativity, a deliberate engagement that is not immediately compatible with an account of sub-conscious desire. To fail to recognise that disjuncture would be to make the extremely problematic argument that all of those kinds of performances always contain within them an unconscious relationship of desire that is apparent to the audience (as though the audience is acting as the analyst to the performer).

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[105] Grosz 65.

It is, therefore, more productive to suggest that parody does not necessarily act as any direct articulation of demand or desire (being unable to access the "original," the unconscious seeks out continual replacements) but instead offers an illustration of the structures of seeking the desire of another, especially when acquiring that desire (that is, becoming the object of another's desire) is conditional on assuming a particular subject state.

Camp in Practice: Containment and Resistance

The practice of camp might best be described as the recognition of a discourse, rather than specific images, roles or codified aesthetics. Though camp might be strongly marked by practices of parody – of reproduction and exaggeration – those generic conventions describe a particular relationship to dominant cultural values. The queer potential of a camp performative lies not in the promise of a definitive, radical outcome but in the continuous destabilisation of the status quo. To that end, camp can represent a resistance to a "slicing of every segment of the gay community that is not upper-middle class, mostly white and mostly male," and slows the progression of the Queer Nation slogan described by Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed from "We're here, we're queer, get used to it" to the normative "We're here, we're just like you, don't worry about it."[106] Yet the persistence of difference does not necessarily aid a deconstructive effort. As Cathy Cohen argues of contemporary cultural activism, "a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism. In many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything 'queer.'"[107]

The theoretical account of camp's limitations would appear to gain credence from the practice of camp, that the potential for destabilisation is restrained by a discourse

[106] Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed. "The Gay Marketing Movement." Homo Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life, eds. Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed (New York: Routledge, 1997) 7-8.
[107] Cathy H. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens – The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," Sexual Identities – Queer Politics, ed. Mark Blasius (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton Unversity Press 2001) 201.

too caught up in its own reflexive struggles to act as any kind of radical queer performative. Elements of this problematic reflexivity can certainly be tracked from purely theoretical accounts to performance history. Such a history describes a carnivalesque quality to camp and allows a kind of Bakhtinian observation that camp performers and performances recur within broader cultural generic conventions. Such a reading of camp within mainstream culture can be linked to a British tradition of films in the 1960s and 70s with recurring themes of camp performance, characters and humour, such as those within the "Carry On" series.[108] Many of the "Carry On" films are set within literal holiday spaces – or find space within the narrative for an excursion to "somewhere else" where the characters can get drunk and enjoy confusions of role and identity. "Carry On" films are filled with camp-sites (no pun intended), trips into the past and various other distancing techniques based on specifically parodied genres.

The sub-genre of hospital comedy within the "Carry On" series fits this pattern particularly strongly. Hospitals become a setting where the characters are transplanted from their normal lives and homes and put in circumstances where they have no control over their clothes or bodies. The role-play in these films regularly involves transformations of sex and gender. In Carry On Matron,[109] the narrative revolves around the planned theft of contraceptive pills from a maternity hospital – a plan which necessitates the son of one of the thieves assuming the disguise of a hospital nurse. That role is performed by Kenneth Cope in full drag: makeup, tight nurse's uniform, high heels and stockings. In particular, his appearance mimics the image of a sexually desirable and apparently available nurse performed by Barbara Windsor. Cope's character continually disrupts this performance – removing his wig, performing some kind of deliberately masculine gesture (scratching, or sitting so that we can see his hairy legs) – all of which signals that the role-play is temporary, or at least a surface transformation that leaves an interior identity intact.

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[108] A sequence of thirty-one films to date, shot primarily in the UK with a recurring cast of British comic actors, beginning with Carry On Sergeant (1959) and most recently with Carry On Columbus (1992).

[109] Carry On Matron, dir. Gerald Thomas, perf. Sid James, Kenneth Williams, Charles Hawtrey and Joan Sims, Rank, 1972.

There are, admittedly, several interesting plot developments – Cope's transvestite nurse immediately draws the fervent interest of the resident "sex mad" doctor, played by Terry Scott; Cope is caught, dressed as a nurse, in passionate mock-lesbian embrace with Windsor. However, in a plot that provides socially safe closure, Cope's character has a change of heart about stealing from the hospital and finally marries Windsor's Nurse Ball. While the exaggerated performances of sexuality and gender involved in the production of the "Carry On" series are relatively uncomplicated (and open to accusations of sexism) their presence, longevity and relative success signal the persistent appetite for that kind of humour and narrative in Britain. Such popularity – as in the case of the radio series Round the Horne which will be discussed in some detail below – suggests the normative quality of camp entertainment. Though sometimes framed as risqué or ribald, the kinds of comic performance involved in British camp during the 1960s and 1970s were nonetheless seen as legitimate and within the mainstream of family entertainment.

Round the Horne – Camp in Middle England

Round the Horne was a BBC radio comedy that was broadcast between 1965 and 1969, with audiences at its peak of around 15 million listeners. The program centred on Kenneth Horne, a kind of "straight man" who introduced and took part in a variety of sketches. Parody seems to have been the formal convention around which much of Round the Horne was written: parodies of various stylistic conventions as well as the way the medium of radio was being used at the time. The programme normally opened with the deadpan delivery by Kenneth Horne of the answers to "last week's quiz," a quiz that listeners would never hear. On one occasion, "yes" and "no" were acceptable prize-winning answers. Kenneth Williams performed a recurring character: an old English folk singer Rambling Syd Rumpo, who sang parodic nonsense ditties such as "Green grow your nadgers-O!," "What shall we do with the drunken nurker?" and "The Ballad of the Woggler's Mooly." Betty Marsden and Hugh Paddick appeared as Dame Celia Molestrangler and "ageing juvenile Binkie Huckerback" respectively, who in turn performed the roles of Fiona and

Charles – a pair of love-struck, dated cinema idols engaging in stilted, extraordinarily polite, dialogues, in scenes that were intended to be parodies of Noel Coward's style.

Yet the most intriguing characters – for the issue of a nascent queer performativity – were Julian and Sandy. Kenneth Horne would initially encounter these two characters by accident, sometimes by responding to an advert in a suggestively titled magazine which he would insist he had bought for innocent reasons. This would lead him, more often than not, to a business in Chelsea. Upon entering and asking, "Hello, anyone there?," Julian would formulaically respond, "Hello, I'm Julian and this is my friend Sandy." Each sketch focussed on a separate theme or activity, a legitimate aspect of British life that Julian and Sandy had either taken as a hobby, or invested in as a business enterprise. In "Bona Hunt," Julian and Sandy have opened such a business as hunt masters, though the pursuit of foxes is seemingly replaced by the pursuit of a rather different quarry:

Horne	And where do you hunt from?
Julian	Oh, here – in Carnaby Street.
Horne	There can't be many foxes in Carnaby Street.
Julian	No. Not foxes. There's not what you could call a plethora of foxes round here, but you still have the thrill of the chase.
Horne	The chase? But what can you find to chase in Carnaby Street?
Sandy	He's very jejune, isn't he Jules?
Julian	It's a quality I admire in him. Would that I still had it.[110]

It is important to read the camp characters of Julian and Sandy – performed by Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams – in the context of the other sketches as it gives us some guide as to how we are expected to receive them, as well as suggests a few problems. All of the other comic characters were intended as parodies of one kind or another in the sense of inspiring mockery – rather than pastiches which might imply flattery. It could follow then that as camp characters, Julian and Sandy were a conventional means of defining a derogatory stereotype of homosexuality.

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[110] "Bona Hunt," Round the Horne, perf. Kenneth Williams, Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Horne, writ. Barry Took and Marty Feldman, BBC Light / Radio 2, 14 May 1967. Transcript at <http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/fabulosa/hunt.htm>.

There are here some interesting anomalies. Biographical accounts suggest both Williams and Paddick were closeted homosexuals, which complicates how we might read their participation in the production of seemingly stereotypical and derogatory images of gay people. However, this situation might not necessarily describe a simplistic relationship, such as might be imagined between camp performance and self-loathing. More usefully, such knowledge directs attention to some of the double-impact of camp, of self-affirmation through parody. Richard Dyer, writing in "It's Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going," asserts that the "fun" aspect of camp conceals that it is a form of defence that "confirms and expresses being a gay man" in a culture that confirms and expresses the rightness of heterosexuality. However, he also makes the point that the self-mockery of self-protection can have a corrosive effect in the production and reproduction of images of non-heterosexuals as a "pathetic, inferior, lot."[111]

If mockery of Julian and Sandy was intended, it might be incidental to another target – mockery might also be directed at the straight man Kenneth Horne who enters into the world of Julian and Sandy as a somewhat naïve character who does not quite understand what is being said to him. The suggestion that the character of Kenneth Horne and potentially a substantial portion of the audience were ignorant to the subtext of many of the sketches stems from the presence of a dialect called "polari," of which many words and phrases can be found throughout the script.

Private Language in Public Performance

Paul Baker (a leading researcher of polari at the University of Lancaster) identifies polari as "mainly a lexicon, derived from a variety of sources … rhyming slang, backslang (saying a word as if it is spelt backwards), Italian, Occitan, French, Lingua Franca, American air force slang, drug-user slang, Parlyaree (an older form of slang used by tinkers, beggars and travelling players) and Cant (an even older form of

[111] Richard Dyer, "It's Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going," Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject; a reader, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 111.

slang used by criminals)."[112] Drawing on primary interviews within the gay community and through various archival materials Baker has constructed a history of polari as a lexicon used mainly by gay men, though also by lesbians, female impersonators, theatre people, prostitutes and sea-queens (gay men in the merchant navy). Straight people who were connected to the theatre also used polari, and there are numerous cases of gay men teaching it to their straight friends. Round the Horne registers this interchange, allowing Horne to acquire a few words and phrases. Horne enters into the marked language of Julian and Sandy and runs the risk of becoming marked himself:

Horne	Well could I have a vada at your entrees?
Sandy	Oh, he's bold!
Julian	Here's the menu.
Horne	Hmm. I see you've got lally of lamb on.
Julian	Yes, lamb's nice – or there's your jugged riah. That's palare for hare. We got it from our special charcuterie.[113]

Polari was used most commonly from the 1930s through to the1970s, in private gay drinking establishments, particularly in London but also in many other UK cities. Crucially, polari's quality as a secret language meant it could also often be used in public spaces – such as on the London Underground.

Baker speculates that there were (and potentially still are) various reasons why people would use polari: as a form of protection and secrecy – it excluded outsiders who would not be able to tell what you were talking about, and allowed gay people to conceal their sexuality; it could be used to talk about other people while they were present, and was particularly useful when cruising with friends. Within the scripts of Round the Horne is the suggestion that there is some kind of elided activity closely associated with the characters of Julian and Sandy:

Horne	Can you help me? I've erred.

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[112] Paul Baker, "Polari: What is it?" 10 Jan. 2006 <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/paulb/polari/home.htm>.
[113] "La Casserole de Bona Gourmet," Round the Horne, BBC Light / Radio 2, 21 May 1967. Transcript at <http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/fabulosa/gourmet.htm>.

Sandy	Well, we've all erred, ducky. I mean, it's common knowledge, ennit, Jules?
Horne	Will you take my case?
Julian	Well, it depends on what it is. We've got a criminal practice that takes up most of our time.
Horne	Yes, but apart from that - I need legal advice.
	[...]
	Well - look, it's here on this charge sheet.
Sandy	Let's have a vada. Oh Jule, look at this!
Julian	Ooh! He didn't!
Sandy	He did. Look, it's written down.
Julian	But I mean - in broad daylight - outside the Corner House - aren't you ashamed?
Horne	Yes - but it is only a parking offence.[114]

The exchange is intriguing because Julian and Sandy's camp response guides us to a crime that camp people might get arrested for and then denies it – making an implicit association between homosexual identity, public indecency and the criminality that was codified in law at that time.

Baker also identifies that polari could be used as a form of attack, to insult or humiliate others. It was a form of humour and camp performance, and also a way of initiating people into the gay or theatre subculture. It allowed its users to construct a view of reality based upon their own values, or to give names to things that mainstream culture had not recognised (such as certain forms of gay sex). The capacity of polari to act as a means of self-nomination within a heterosexist discourse suggests a potential that camp performances acting alone lack. In Round the Horne, the presence of polari acts to transform the presentation of camp characters – for a select audience, a private community is extended and those ignorant of the meaning of polari are forced into guessing the significance of what is being said (or miss what is being said completely). The use of polari in Round the Horne remains somewhat of an unknown element – it is difficult to discover what proportion of the audience would have recognised polari and the group of people whose presence it inferred.

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[114]"Bona Law," Round the Horne, BBC Light / Radio 2, 19 Feb. 1967. Transcript at <http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/fabulosa/law.htm>.

There is also the potential for polari to be used as the means of constructing particularly strong camp parodies that do not rely directly on masculine/feminine identities. An insight into one such current use of polari comes from the Manchester house of an organisation called the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a high-visibility cross-dressing group, whose website hosts a complete polari translation of the King James Bible. A relatively complex process was used to convert the text, creating a program in a computer language called Perl to track and replace words and phrases with corresponding polari terms. To quote their website:

> since the decriminalisation of homosexuality some years ago [polari] is no longer used as a means of concealing meaning from outsiders. It is, instead, used for its tremendous camp value. [115]

This further draws attention to the notion that even when we cannot strictly define camp we can recognise it fairly easily: to quote Genesis, book one and verse one, "And Gloria cackled, Let there be sparkle: and there was sparkle."[116] Recognising the presence of polari in Round the Horne and other camp performances might allow us to develop the kind of strategy Cathy Cohen registers in her paper "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens – The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" that "what seems to make queer activists unique, at this particular moment, is their willingness to confront normalizing power by emphasising and exaggerating their own anti-normative characteristics and non-stable behaviour." [117] The camp performer or performative is then related to the practice of "coming out," the affirmation of an identity, declaring and displaying it as a positive difference from a presumptive norm which has also served as the measure of superiority.

This notion is explored in Paul Baker's wider study, Polari – The Lost Language of Gay Men, in which he further defines polari in terms of a method of cultural

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[115] "The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Polari King James Bible," The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, 10 Jun. 2005 <http://www.thesisters.demon.co.uk/bible/introduction.htm>.
[116] Gen 1:1, "The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Polari King James Bible," The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence 10 Jun. 2005 <http://www.thesisters.demon.co.uk/bible/genesis.htm>.
[117] Cathy H. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens – The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" 202.

resistance and positive difference. Rather than somehow operating outside of existing terms, polari is an "anti-language" which is:

> to anti-society what language [is] to society. An anti-society is a counter-culture, a society within a society, a conscious alternative to society, existing by resisting either passively or by more hostile, destructive means. Anti-languages are generated by anti-societies and in their simplest forms are partially relexicalised languages, consisting of the same grammar but a different vocabulary in areas central to the activities of subcultures.[118]

If polari is an anti-language it might be seen to behave in a particularly flexible manner. Anti-language can be described in the sense of Judith Butler's "unspeakable" speech, operating outside the definitions of intelligible, legitimate communication – which in turn denotes a subject who is neither intelligible nor legitimate. In Butler's model, particular forms of speech do not denote different kinds of subject. "Unspeakable" subjects are not true – that is legitimate – subjects at all; legitimate speech is the product and hallmark of legitimate subjectivity. That is, speech that can be recognised is produced by subjects who can be recognised.

However, as Baker suggests, polari does not constitute a wholly separate system of signification. It is not a formal language in its own right, but primarily a lexicon within standardised speech. While the use of polari might mark a subject's entry into a particular (speech) community, it does not replace an earlier affiliation or ability to speak as a legitimate subject. Polari confers an additional status that potentially marks membership of a cultural subset. In this manner, the sense of polari departs from Butler's sense of the unspeakable which does not infer any sense of alternative communal function from "legitimate" speech. It is more appropriate to think of polari as speech that is simultaneously intelligible and unintelligible: polari is not an entirely foreign language but a native language transformed to become alien within its own dominant paradigm. As the presence of polari within Round the Horne illustrates, recognition and use of polari does not necessarily indicate comprehension. The indeterminacy of polari nevertheless allows individuals to indicate a form of solidarity. For Halliday, anti-languages are reconstructions of reality, which contain

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[118] Paul Baker, Polari – The Lost Language of Gay Men (London: Routledge, 2002) 13.

processes that enable individuals to establish identification with significant others. Polari, however, would appear to act as the means of establishing the *existence* of like-minded others. Part of that tentative claim is the argument that a specific mode of signification might also provide for the existence of a particular subject state.

Yet a significant quality of anti-languages is that they are secret because the anti-society to which they refer is secret – the language acts as the key of entry to that society. A reflection of this potential secrecy is that it is impossible to discover to what degree the "general public" people listening to Round the Horne were able to understand it, and of that number how many were aware of the specific connotations of non-heterosexual identity. Polari, then, might be thought to extend an unusual double-bind, being a form of open secret and open closet, offering speech acts that denote "outness" while allowing a subject to remain ostensibly closeted. The secretive quality of polari-inflected speech acts to border and delimit their desired effect; to "come out" indirectly using polari would be to limit the number of people who might understand that declaration.

Instead, polari users are able to indicate a particular sexual orientation without having to offer public confirmation. Baker draws attention to this linguistic flexibility, arguing for differences in reception of an anti-language in relation to its referent anti-culture:

> As a means of enabling the maintenance of secrecy in certain contexts, Polari could also be used to construct either a cautiously "out" identity or a flamboyantly, aggressive "out" identity, depending on how it was used. Within the gay subculture, Polari enabled the expression of effeminate identities, even to those who didn't always want to own up to them.[119]

Baker's reading of polari in this instance also indicates a persistent discomfort arising from the association of homosexuality with effeminacy, that "[i]n pre-Queer politics, certain aspects of camp were seen as degrading, both to gay men, and to

[119] Baker 84.

women – the belief appears to have been that gay men, by acting like women, were degrading women as well as themselves."[120]

Terms and Conditions

Polari does not offer any escape from dominant discourses of gender and sexuality; at most, polari would appear to offer the potential for evasion, for public disclosure of secrets which remain, in part, secret. Yet that practice is framed in the terms of the existing discourse:

> Many of the words used to classify different types of people (a category comprising 30 percent of all nouns) appear to work in terms of their relationship to *binary constructions*. For example, a Polari noun will refer to someone's sexuality as homosexual or heterosexual, to their sex (male or female), gender (e.g. Butch or camp), age (young or old) or attractiveness (beautiful or ugly).[121]

This structural dependence on binary constructions assists a reading of polari as parody, a structure that invokes and re-establishes existing normative categories. Though homosexuality might be continue to be represented as the illegitimate opposite of heterosexuality, it remains the primary expression of non-heterosexual identity. That is, male homosexuality in particular acquires cultural currency as the valid, recognised expression of non-heterosexual identity. This too is reflected in the structure of polari's vocabulary:

> Certain combinations of binaries are more common than others. So there are lots of words that describe feminine men, or gay men, or feminine gay men, but fewer words are used to refer to masculine men, lesbians, or masculine gay men.

Baker's observation would seem to indicate that polari's process of relexicalisation has taken its structural emphases from existing linguistic and cultural practices – insofar as they replicate a focus on the stereotype of the effeminate gay man and, in particular, the gay man as the indicative subject of homosexuality (concealing or

[120] Baker 116.
[121] Baker 41. Emphasis original.

ignoring female/lesbian subjects). However, this apparent lexical bias might not prohibit the production of alternative subject categories. Reference to existing nominative categories here allows the experimental construction of alternatives:

> The use of the words *omee* (man) and *palone* (woman) reveals an interesting formula in deriving categories. While an *omee* refers to any man, and *palone* to any woman, the word *omee-palone* (man-woman) refers specifically to a homosexual man. The combination of the two words cannot be taken as a literal translation (the closest thing to a "man-woman" would be a hermaphrodite). However, the ordering of the words appears to be important, as the example *palone-omee* testifies. It appears that the first word of the pair refers to sex, while the second to sexuality or gender, or a combination of both.[122]

Existing binary terms are used in polari to formulate new gender identities, using identified and legitimated subject states to construct unrecognisable, alternative subject states.

However, it is questionable as to whether those terms have been or are used in acts of self-nomination in the same way gay, lesbian or queer (for example) are used. Identity labels or categories in polari appear to be used more to identify and categorise others; the self-nomination process in polari arises when those terms are used to describe others – and to describe desire for or the desirability of others. Self-nomination appears to act reflexively or as a secondary action to the use of nominative speech: by describing someone else as an *omee-palone*, I identify myself as someone who might also be a homosexual man. However, while this structure exists it does not describe a definitive relationship between polari use and subject identity. We know from several studies, including Baker's work which may represent the most recent field research that the use of polari nouns (noun phrases used to describe particular kinds of subject) has never been limited exclusively to gay men. The nominative acts enabled in polari are also dependent upon a sense of being-through-community, not only in the sense of a shared lexicon but through recognition of the limited combinations and re-orderings of sex and gender in a binary system. Polari cannot offer definitive self-nomination, only the prospect of re-alignment.

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[122] Baker 42.

The relationship of polari and camp to existing normative categories of gender, and to performative traditions of comedy and parody are persistently problematic:

> Polari's link to comedy is crucial – but ultimately one that limits its potential as a true language. It could be used as a way to mitigate appalling circumstances faced by homosexual men: arrests, entrapments, blackmail and hostility etc. by rendering them comic. As a coping mechanism in the face of potential tragedy, Polari supplies an ironic distance from the real world, turning power structures upside down [...].[123]

Rather than serving to radicalise its users, or to articulate demand for change, polari's "ironic distance" might only train a tolerance for the existing situation, offering the means of temporary survival that also mitigate the need for lasting change. As performative methodologies, polari and camp might act temporarily to invert the power structures that produce arrests, blackmail and hostility but ultimately leaves them intact.

[123] Baker 77.

For many gay performers working within traditional theatre and television, the shortcomings of camp signalled an existing problem within theatrical culture – manifested in a problematic allegiance with homophobic or, at best, frequently stereotypical representations of gay men and women. Though camp's mode of heightened performance and parody might allow a re-ordering of identities based on fixed categories of sex and gender, it remains evasive. In particular, such an indeterminate relationship between homosexual identities and camp performances limits the degree to which camp might be mobilised as a performative tool of a politically minded gay or gay-friendly community. Significantly, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a European political agenda more closely focussed on civil and social rights that assumed a pregiven constituency: a particular class or group of subjects whose sexuality had been the cause for prejudicial treatment.

The agendas of groups such as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) (and later Stonewall) were focussed on specific programmes of legal and social reform, on decriminalising homosexuality, equalising the age of consent and confirming civil partnership rights.

> What was new was the consequential stress on homosexuality as a political issue. With this came a new emphasis on the oppression of gay people, a belief that the taboo against homosexuality was so deeply embodied in Western civilisation (the "Judaeo-Christian culture") that only a revolutionary overthrow of its structures could truly liberate the homosexual. Furthermore, this could not be done by others *for* the homosexual, but only by homosexuals themselves, acting openly and together.[124]

The recognition of the legitimacy of homosexual subjects was crucially dependent on individuals who were prepared to identify as homosexual, to "come out" and demand social justice. Though the GLF in particular expressed the value of ghettoisation of a gay community, the desire for gay rights to become part of the mainstream political process – rather than a niche issue that could be ignored – signalled a necessary

[124] Jeffrey Weeks, Coming Out (1977; London: Quarter Book, 1990) 186.

retreat from traditional stereotypes of gay identity, even if those stereotypes might be reclaimed in some way as positive. The claim for recognition of legitimate difference was expressed through a partial claim on normativity, that gay men and women were living "normal lives."

The development of this claim on political and social self-determination was paralleled by the emergence of performative strategies that sought greater control over the terms of representation of gay men and women, recognising the importance of the role of forms of cultural representation in the process of change. These strategies laid claim to the machinery of cultural production as a means to that end; liberation and equality could be best achieved through participation in the processes of production and reproduction of non-heterosexual identities. This kind of political strategy provides the context for the work of the Gay Sweatshop theatre company, a group formed in the late 1970s with the intention of creating authentically gay productions: narratives and characters that reflected their own experiences rather than the expectations of stereotype. This work demanded the involvement of gay people not only as performers but as writers, directors, producers and stage managers.

The original group that formed the basis for Gay Sweatshop was drawn from a public advert in the gay press; "membership," as such, was self-nominating, with no particular demand on the sexuality of those involved. Significantly, the first meeting that led to the development of Gay Sweatshop as an autonomous company was initiated by an established theatre specialising in community sponsored productions:

> ***Season of Gay Plays***
>
> The Almost Free is planning a Gay Season (along the lines of last year's highly successful Women's Season) for autumn '74 and is interested in hearing from anyone with a play (*not* professionally produced previously if possible) suggestions etc. Write to Sue Carroll, Inter-Action, 14 Talacre Rd., London NW5.[125]

[125] Philip Osment, ed. Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and a Company (London, Portsmouth: Methuen, 1989) vii. Original emphases.

Rather than directly acquiring plays which the Almost Free could then stage with an existing group of performers, directors and technical crew, this call began a series of meetings in which a self-determining group would identify its own artistic and political priorities. As such, the origins of Gay Sweatshop owe much to the development of collectivist theatre in Europe and parts of North America since the 1960s, with a history paralleled by the emergence of the Gay Men's Theatre Collective in San Francisco in 1976 as the result of "a series of workshops by gay men who had done theatre and wanted to work together. As a way of getting to know each other, the actors told each other stories about their lives that dealt with their survival as gay men."[126] The Gay Sweatshop archive begins with the records of these first meetings which attempted to form a plan of action for the coming year – how would appropriate plays be found? how would their production be financed? – alongside a statement of principles that would describe the motivation for the creation of a specifically gay theatre group.

The early records of this nascent company are notable for their multiple revisions and alterations, a majority of which are unsigned. While some minutes detail who was present at particular meetings and the opinions they voiced, individual "authorship" is rarely asserted, and – as is perhaps to be expected – normally only in the case of individual letters and play manuscripts. Furthermore, the shifting style and consistency of company records helps indicate how the composition and leadership of the group was continually open to change; while certain members' names recur and eventually emerge to take positions of responsibility within the group, the records of the early meetings suggest a process of collaboration and collective revision. The consequences of this approach are apparent in a number of ways, notably in relation to collective definition; one of the earliest documents in the archive indicates suggestions for alternative names (the Gay Sweatshop, the Gay Theatre Workshop, or even the Screaming Theatre) and organisational structures which carry their own subtle emphases.

[126] Terry Helbing, "Gay Plays, Gay Theatre, Gay Performance," TDR 25.1 (Mar. 1981): 41.

There are, however, some very clear priorities identified in the early manifesto statements of the Gay Theatre Caucus – the germinal Gay Sweatshop – which reflect not only the libertarian, collectivist origins of the group but a specific political agenda. The creation of a specifically gay theatre group was identified as "necessary in order to put across ideas that clearly cannot be presented through other means." Conventional theatre and television "continue[d] to project stereotyped images of gay people and to treat homosexuality as a pathetic deviation or as a grotesque joke."[127]

The apparent historical willingness of conventional performance to participate in the production of those stereotypes was presented as a challenge to the belief that the theatre community was either a "hot bed" of homosexuality, or overtly liberal and therefore tolerant of homosexuality. Instead, the prevailing atmosphere of professional performance was such as that:

> gay actors and theatre personnel are discouraged from coming out [and] are sometimes forced to enter into a tacit collusion with managements in the presentation of oppressive distortions of gayness in plays and other shows. (GS/1/1/1)

There are here two central political principles: that the oppression of gay people was directly linked to the production and reproduction of damaging, limited and stereotypical images of homosexuality; secondly, the presumption that the performing arts is "gay-friendly" was misleading and served only to conceal the fact that the simultaneous discouragement to come out and the participation of homosexuals in producing derogatory images acted as a second strand of oppression – self-oppression.

The Gay Theatre Caucus planned to work in support of gay actors and theatre personnel, encouraging them to "come out and work on relevant material." The need was identified for plays which were "politically motivated, which explore[d] the

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[127] (GS/1/1/1) For ease of presentation, following material from the company records of the Gay Sweatshop is referenced in text as it appears in the archive of the library at Royal Holloway, University of London. See Appendix A for full archival listings.

roots of gay oppression and which [we]re designed to work some change in their audiences." The company would have no hierarchy and would – despite the desire to be seen primarily as an openly gay company – be "open to any interested and concerned individuals irrespective of their sexuality." (GS/1/1/1) Every member would have an equal say in the selection and presentation of material and in the running of the group itself.

There are here significant parallels to collectivist direct action. For example, ACT UP (a New York based group formed in 1987, committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis) offers membership and voting rights – that is, a say in the choice of actions and the selection of facilitators – on the basis of attendance at three meetings. There are no dues or fees; there is no annual membership fee. The group's work is driven by those who participate:

> There is only one body of authority in ACT UP – supreme and unappealable – and that is the general floor at the weekly Monday night meetings. It is the sole legitimating and financial authority. The floor can, by majority vote, decide whatever it wishes.[128]

However, this particular model of autonomy and collective determination differs significantly from the management structure which dominated the earliest productions of Gay Sweatshop.

The difficulty of putting into practice stringent principles was influenced by the relationship between the nascent Gay Sweatshop and Inter-Action, the group whose letter in Gay News triggered the founding of the company. Inter-Action was a community arts resource centre based in London's Kentish Town, later known as Inter-Change. It was a radical organization, run co-operatively as a

> charitable trust founded in 1968 by Ed Berman to stimulate community involvement in the arts, especially through the use of drama and creative play, and to experiment in theatre/media and their social applications.[129]

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[128] "The ACT UP Working Document," ACT UP New York, 2 Dec. 2005 <http://www.actupny.org/documents/workdoc.html>.
[129] Osment xiv.

The theatre production unit was based in the Almost Free Theatre, just off Shaftesbury Avenue in central London. The theatre's name arose from its policy of not having a fixed ticket price and asking the audience to contribute instead what they could afford. The name also had a second significance: "the aim was to produce plays that would lead people to the brink of liberation – to the state of being 'almost free' – at which point they could choose to take action."[130] At the Almost Free, Inter-Action had a lunchtime theatre club called Ambiance and, after a successful women's season and black season, decided that at the height of the Gay Liberation Movement there was the need for a season produced by gay people.

The women's season at Inter-Action in 1973 had led to the creation of the Women's Theatre Group, whose working practices also show some resemblance to those adopted by Gay Sweatshop. The Women's Theatre Group was a mixed-sex company with women in the majority, where the permanent company members were all women and preference was given to women in the hiring of directors, designers and other personnel. Actors formed the majority of the company's membership and acted collectively as performer-led management; the company alternated between company-devised work and work commissioned or received from women writers outside of the group. As with Gay Sweatshop, the group emphasised the necessity of control over the terms of production and performance of women's lives if those lives were to be represented truthfully:

> As women they have the power to control the work they do (whatever power struggles and differences there are within the group). In the aesthetics of their work, because there are no men in the group, they are forced to conceive, evolve and commission work which is absolutely situated on the territory of women's experiences and relationships.[131]

Inter-Action offered to provide a theatre, technical staff and the opportunity for a group of gay people to learn about all aspects of production from front of house management to direction. The emphasis on people from a given group learning the

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[130] Osment xiv.

[131] Michelene Wandor, "The Impact of Feminism on the Theatre", Feminist Review 18 (Winter 1984): 78.

skills needed to produce their own theatre is significant – and one that fits with Gay Sweatshop's impulse to combat derogatory images of gay subjects through the production of their own alternative images. Unless Gay Sweatshop – or any other company with the same intent – could take control over the process of production, they could be prey to the same problems they had encountered in mainstream theatre: being defined in part or in whole by limited, homophobic characters and narratives.

As meetings continued in the autumn of 1974 and spring of 1975, discussion focussed on what form the first season of plays should take, and in particular under what title those plays should be collectively publicised. Various names were proposed and the eventual title – "Homosexual Acts" – was chosen despite objections from some (unnamed) members of the group: "Some thought the word 'homosexual' in the title would provoke the wrong sort of response." Correspondingly, the alternative titles proposed for the season ranged from the direct – "Revolting Homosexual Spectacle" – to the more oblique – "The People You Warned Us About" (GS/1/2/9).

Such discussions indicate that though the group might share a commitment to theatre staged by and for openly gay people, that commitment would not translate simply into a singular preference for particular performative strategies. The uncertainty over the impact of the headline use of the word "homosexual" might indicate various tensions between public and private identities, between being out as a gay person and being outrageous, between wanting to present a public image of homosexuality and being conscious of how that attempt will be received. Similarly, an awareness that certain terms, images and narratives could alienate those the Gay Sweatshop's work was intended to "work some change in" would have to be balanced against the desire to not only encourage others to come out but to do so through "truthful" and "relevant" theatre.

The records in the Royal Holloway archive show that the plays for the first season at the Almost Free Theatre were chosen by – and originated largely from within – the group. Though the company did solicit scripts from outside sources, those scripts did

not necessarily reflect the politics and ideals of the group.[132] As the group fluctuated in size and composition, and decisions and policies had to be continually re-assessed and explained to newcomers, is it perhaps fortunate that the company had the support of the comparatively stable and formalised Inter-Action production team. It is also significant that Ed Berman – leading the Inter-Action team – retained artistic control and had final approval on the choice of plays for the season. It is difficult to ascertain precisely what kind of influence – or indeed limitations – Berman might have brought to the first season at the Almost Free. He was certainly key to the decision to reject Jill Posener's Any Woman Can as a candidate for that first season, consequently meaning that the narratives and cast of that season was exclusively male-oriented. However, Berman – and Inter-Action – are perhaps most appropriately understood to have acted as an enabling force; though the management of Inter-Action might have asserted their own criteria on the first season, the involvement of Inter-Action was crucial in making that season financially and practically viable. Crucially, the exposure and experience garnered from that initial season formed the basis for Gay Sweatshop's emergence as an independent theatre company.

A recurring issue – and one in which Ed Berman and Inter-Action appear to have played little part – was of whether gay actors alone should be allowed to participate. In January of 1975 the group met to discuss a request from a local campaign group:

> South London GLF [Gay Liberation Front] has brought up the points that cast should be totally gay. GS [Gay Sweatshop] appeared not to take a hard line about this [...]. GLF would like a stronger line in the plays produced. Gay Sweatshop took the view that good theatre must be the foremost consideration. (GS/1/2/1/2)

Gay Sweatshop's commitment to "good politics" was balanced with a desire for "good theatre," through the perception that a reputation as a professional theatre company rather than a polemical theatre company would be more productive. Many members of the group had worked as professional actors or directors in the mainstream theatre and television community. Given the desire to retain such status,

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[132] Osment xiv.

it is not difficult to understand how this might translate into a desire to see gay theatre produced to the same standards and quality as straight theatre. However, such a demand for professionalism can be considered not only as a desire to be taken seriously but also as part of the company's long-term project to encourage other similarly qualified and respected performers to "come out" and join that work. The connection of political work to social and professional relationships is significant, given that many gay actors may have believed that "coming out" would damage their casting prospects and may have been advised as such by drama school tutors and theatrical agents. It would appear important, then, that a group of gay actors prove that their work was of a high quality and that their sexuality did not present a conflict with their professionalism. It might also be noted that the creation of a professional touring company, rather than a local, community-based company might guarantee professional, Equity rates of pay for performers.

After meetings throughout the summer and autumn of 1974, and the postponement of the season of plays from that autumn into the spring of 1975, three plays were chosen by the company: Limitations, Thinking Straight and Ships. Philip Osment, an early company member and editor of one of the few published collections of Gay Sweatshop plays, asserts that during the Almost Free season the rule was that while the writers and directors should be gay, the actors need not necessarily be. In preparation for the production of Ships, company meeting minutes record that the author expressed the opinion that he "would like the actors to be gay simply because they will naturally understand the meaning of the play, although, this is of course by no means essential." (GS/1/1/12) This contributed to the situation whereby, as Osment describes, one actor "wrote a biography for the programme which said that he had a wife, two children and three cats and lived in married bliss in Clapham. It is understandable that many people found it offensive that he should have asserted his heterosexuality in this way."[133] If the authenticity of Gay Sweatshop's performances were in part dependent on the assertion of homosexuality as a real, legitimate identity, this kind of assertive claim on heterosexual identities was problematic. Such a claim might demonstrate that homosexuality was more a performance rather than a

[133] Osment xvii.

legitimate subjectivity – that homosexual identities were of the calibre of subjectivity that could be easily reproduced, being as they were derivatives of a presumptive, essential heterosexuality. Stories could be told about homosexual lives by heterosexual people without any meaningful loss of authenticity because homosexuality was ultimately a performed, rather than essential, quality. Once more, homosexuality is framed as a derivative of an original, essential heterosexuality, alongside the suggestion that such an identity needed to be kept at arm's length. To identify or be mistakenly identified with such an identity would be damaging.

Despite these initial problems, the commercial public success of these initial three plays (Ships having its run extended and Thinking Straight transferring to another theatre) led to the opportunity to extend the season. Several more plays were selected – at some speed. Two of these plays – One Person and Haunted Host, both written by an American, Robert Patrick – proved to be a significant point of dispute for the company. Some company members objected on the grounds that as an American, Patrick's plays would not reflect life as it was lived by those watching in the audience. More significantly, Alan Wakeman (another early member of the company) was moved to resign, writing in an open letter that the "choice of plays perpetuate every single lie about gay people." Referring to Haunted Host and One Person in his 1975 resignation letter, Wakeman defined what he perceived those lies to be: that all gays are "camp queens," that all gay relationships are doomed to failure, that gays frequently kill themselves, that all gays are unhappy and that being gay is a problem which leads to psychological difficulties. He also objected to the situation whereby "neither of the two directors appointed can even remotely be described as openly gay." (GS/1/2/1/1)

Here we have a sense of how difficult it becomes to apply stringent political positions to artistic material and working practice, particularly when a group needs to go beyond its immediate or core membership for performers, playwrights and directors. There is also the fear of any negative-seeming image being propagated by gay performers – though some gay people might be camp, might be driven toward suicide, might have had failed relationships – those narratives cannot be presented

because they are the traditional leitmotifs of gay subjectivity. The desire to work on "relevant material" might be seen to have been balanced against a desire to focus on culturally positive narratives and identities that could counter such limited readings of gay identity. "Relevant material" in this sense is intentionally selective, particularly given the challenge of reading a continuity between sexuality and day-to-day life; when and where will that life be significantly indicative of sexuality? Further to this question is the recognition that conflicting political priorities might pull productions in competing directions – between presenting gay lives as distinct and different, marked by specific joys and difficulties on the one hand and presenting gay lives as broadly normative, in which "coming out" diminishes the power of the closet to demonise non-heterosexual identities on the other. While these positions are not mutually exclusive – and should not be read as a binary pair – they do describe the territory from which different performative emphases might have emerged.

In response to these and other issues, the company had met regularly throughout the summer of 1975 to produce a working constitution. Much of this new document re-words what was set out in the original statement of intent of the previous year:

> Gay Sweatshop is the name of group of openly Gay people who have formed a professional theatre company. Gay Sweatshops objective is to discover and present plays and entertainments with truthfully Gay themes. [...]
>
> Gay Sweatshop also believes that a specifically gay theatre workshop is necessary in order to help and encourage gay theatre "workers, as well as all other gays," to "come out" and openly work on material that will liberate rather than oppress. [...]
>
> Gay Sweatshop acknowledges the fundamental concept of "coming out" as being essential to the solidarity of all gay people, and seeks to strengthen this solidarity by offering its work to working class audiences, educational institutions, and other areas that are not embraced by the traditional theatre context. It challenges traditional established opinion on Homosexuality through its theatre work, choosing material carefully, so as to present and contribute to the development of progressive attitude.
> (GS/1/2/1/18, underlining as original)

This version of the company constitution – from summer 1975 – also makes the clearest statement yet about the politics of a participant's sexuality:

> Gay Sweatshop does not discriminate against directors and performers on the basis of their sexuality [...] although it is vital that he/she is in agreement with Gay Sweatshop's policy, and fully understands it.

It is interesting to note that the discussions also seem to have dwelt almost exclusively upon the sexuality of directors and performers. The sexuality of less visible members of the company – stage managers, lighting technicians and producers – does not seem to have been as significant or problematic, though their experience of discrimination could hardly have been very different. The emphasis was firmly on the members of the company who might construct the company's public, performed reputation as much as the company's choice of dramatic narratives and conventions.

There was, then, an ongoing discussion as to the importance of performers being gay – and being openly gay. The company was certainly aware that in creating a company run exclusively for and by homosexual performers and writers they could be open to criticism. Later that year in October the company received a letter "from [a] group of people questioning Sweatshop's membership policy – seemingly to them, our structure a 'typical male hierarchical structure, left over from straight society, not befitting to our idea of gay culture.'" The company responds by discussing various women who might reply – and that any reply should be circulated within the company. It is noted that "these people [need to] be replied to as quickly as possible." (GS/1/2/1/22)

Certainly, the membership structure which had been identified that summer did carry with it a certain hierarchy: three tiers of members, with only full members who had attended regular meetings for two months, who had committed to company policy and had been formally elected by full members holding voting rights. Furthermore, minutes from a meeting in June 1975 state "Gay Sweatshop's identity was guaranteed by the fact that only openly gay people could become full members (who alone had voting rights) [...]." (GS/1/2/1/17)

Similarly, a meeting in the following August noted that:

> After agreeing that all members of GS should be gay it was decided to call a General Meeting to determine who were to be full members and the formation of a limited company [...]. It was agreed that past productions had paid too little homage to the gay community and that future writers must be gay although we would not exclude "non-out" people.
> (GS/1/2/1/25)

However, it remains difficult to determine to what degree these formal processes outlined in company documents were enforced in practice during the transition from activist collective to professional company. There is little doubt, though, that the issue of membership remained contentious.

The immediate turn to the women of the company to prepare a rebuttal to the allegation of a "typical male hierarchical structure" suggests something of the initial and perhaps uncomfortable role of gay women within the early work of Gay Sweatshop. Unrepresented in the first season of plays, the divergent demands for the representation of gay men and gay women led to the eventual creation of two separate units touring and producing new plays almost independently while remaining under the communal Gay Sweatshop banner.

The decision to form two separate companies – sharing the benefit of common publicity and potential for funding – under the same name may also have allowed Gay Sweatshop to avoid the kind of disputes that marked other contemporaneous political movements. The male dominance of the London GLF, for example, produced a seeming prioritisation of gay male concerns and strategies over lesbian issues. Such male dominance was seen by the women of GLF as the reproduction of traditional sexist power arrangements and led to their withdrawal:

> By early 1972, after a think-in on the subject, the women in London GLF decided to withdraw and set up an autonomous organization. They gave three reasons: the drain on their energy by the endless fight against the men's sexism; the unradical nature of GLF politics generally; and the need to provide a "viable alternative to the exploitative 'straight' gay ghetto." This

> was not, in fact, a final break as women and men continued to work together in various functional groupings, but it was indicative.[134]

The functional and perhaps pragmatic separation of Gay Sweatshop into two touring groups allowed the theatre those groups produced to focus more specifically on gender-oriented issues, played in turn to more specific audiences. The move was also concurrent with the desire for gay men and women to take control of the production and reproduction of their own identities on stage: gay men would present gay men, lesbians would present lesbians.

The first successful women's play – that is, a play that dealt with the issues of gay women – was Any Woman Can, written by Jill Posener. Posener's original proposal had been accepted by the company for the opening season, vetoed by Ed Berman on the grounds of insufficient dramatic structure, then taken up by a Women's Season at the Leicester Haymarket. Directed by Kate Crutchley, Any Woman Can had a one-off performance; the play then transferred for a longer run at the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London as part of the second Gay Sweatshop season, with the same director and a varying cast.

Writing ten years after the production, Posener described some of the difficulties she encountered during that season, difficulties which reflect those encountered by the male section of the company in the opening season:

> The [...] lesson that I learnt was that we should have used lesbian actresses in the ICA production. Later we would make a political choice only to employ lesbians and gay men. [...] We employed an entirely lesbian company to tour the show and I know I for one took an almost defiant pride in our uncompromising stand that only lesbians could play lesbian parts. (GS/3/3/1/1)

A contemporaneous interview with Posener and the cast of Any Woman Can published in Gay News makes the nature of those difficulties explicit:

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[134] Weeks 200.

> The fact that all the actresses were heterosexuals came out during the second day's discussions and hell broke loose. Jill was enraged. "Once they found out it became a matter of the actresses' personal lives rather than their performances. Some people said they felt let down, disappointed. They said the play was a fake. They told the actresses that they didn't belong, that they were trespassing on things they didn't know anything about."

The anger of the audience was met by an effort from the cast to distance themselves from the issue of straight performers playing gay characters:

> Patricia Garwood took it all in her stride but felt that there was a basic misunderstanding of what acting is all about. "Kate Crutchley played a princess ... in the West End last month. Me playing a lesbian is akin to her being the essence of frail femininity in that play. I think it's almost a step forward that the cast are *not* lesbians. The play shows that relationships are relationships."
>
> Elizabeth Lindsay who brilliantly plays the closeted Julie, reacted much more strongly. "One is just an actress doing a part. I find it terribly alarming that people want you to stand up and make a statements about your sexuality." As a small act of defiance she and Sandra [Freeman, playing the lead Ginny] made a brief appearance at one discussion holding hands. "Now everyone will think we're gay," she said contentedly.[135]

The attempt to invoke some sense of distance between performer and performance is framed here as a positive measure, a mark of professionalism that admits no bias. However, this normalisation – that "one is just an actress doing a part" and "relationships are relationships" – acts to minimise the particular difficulties or circumstances involved in the construction of a public, gay identity. Such an identity acquires a mock gestic quality, invoked and dismissed by the holding of hands.

This problematic disparity between "theatrical" and "real" identities illustrates that the particular demands for authenticity within Gay Sweatshop were mirrored by those of their audiences. Though the company might feel uneasy that membership should be contingent on sexuality, the desire to avoid practices that would invoke traditional methods of discrimination would have to be balanced against audience expectations:

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[135] Gay News, No. 92. March 1976.

> It is one thing to go and watch a play with gay actors, but altogether another to watch a play put on by a gay company where connections are being made between the audience, the actors and the material.[136]

The involvement of the cast in after-performance discussions compounded the link between performative action and "real lives": that both members of the cast and the audience would be able to construct parallels with the stories presented onstage and their own personal circumstances. Though the company sought initially to produce representations of gay women and men that would correct and speak against derogatory stereotypes, that practice would necessitate the presence of "un-performed" lives – that is, lives seemingly unmarked by conventions of artifice or theatrical performance. For audiences and company, the legitimacy of the imagery produced by Gay Sweatshop was confirmed by its claim to the Real – that although gay identities could be reproduced onstage, such reproduction was dependent on the presence of a subjectivity that preceded theatrical invocation.

This interplay between performed identity and performer's identity appears to have formed the basis for Mister X, a production in the second season of Gay Sweatshop plays which later toured alongside Any Woman Can. While the demand for performative authenticity was apparent in the post-performance discussions of the first performances of Any Woman Can, Mister X made that link an explicit part of the dramatic structure. As such, Mister X might be said to address the kinds of audience expectation apparent in the experiences of the production of Any Woman Can – and to use those expectations as a functional element of the performance.

Mister X, written by Roger Baker and Drew Griffiths, opened at the Sheffield Campaign for Homosexual Equality conference in late August of 1975 before moving to London to open the second season of plays at the ICA in 1976. Mister X's main focus was self-oppression, as the central gay character refused the need to

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[136] Osment xxi.

identify as gay: "Mister X attacked the sort of apolitical gay man who would go to gay bars but ridicule the idea of Gay Liberation and pretend he didn't need it."[137]

A secondary character – a cabaret entertainer – performed his act of sexist, racist and homophobic jokes, enacting the participation of both audiences and performers in the propagation of derogatory images that silence – or the refusal to speak out, rather than the lack of speaking position – brought about. Mister X explicitly invokes a tension between public and private identities, where the hidden, homosexual life of the character Mister X is read as his core identity, an identity inseparable from any other part of his self. The denial of that core identity is constructed as a denial of self. In turn, that self-oppression operates to support and propagate the oppression of others, reiterating a structure of public/private, legitimate/illegitimate, heterosexual/homosexual dichotomies.

The play closes when Mister X, a role originally performed by Alan Pope, walks to the front and centre of the stage and says: "My name is Mister.. My name is Alan Pope and I live at 10 Marius Mansions, Marius Road, London SW17 and I'm gay." (GS/3/2/1) At that moment, the performer playing part takes the place of that character and a fictional narrative is replaced with a real world, counter-theatrical biography. The legitimacy in representation sought by Gay Sweatshop is brought about by transcribing the performer's own life into that of the part he plays. The kinds of anxiety experienced by the audience after the first performances of Any Woman Can are avoided here by making explicit the principle that fictional representations are underwritten by the presence of material, public lives. To claim and demonstrate legitimacy in the presentation of gay subjects, it is seen as not only necessary to be gay, but to be openly gay; as such, in this system there are no private gay subjects, only closeted ones. This principle also serves to underwrite the political function of a staged "coming out": a demonstration and invocation to others to do the same. The transition from an etiolated, theatrical "coming out" to a socially and politically consequential "coming out" is managed through the super-imposition of the actor's own name and address that prevents the end of the performance from

[137] Osment xx.

acting as symbolic closure and instead extends the staged act of bravery into the realm of public political action.

This transition is centred on the performer, who identifies the character he has been playing as – in effect – an earlier version of his own self. That fictional persona persists as an extension of the performer's biography, representing or re-enacting the period before he came out. Crucially – and problematically – the efficacy of the representation of "coming out" depends here upon the representation and retention of the closet. At the beginning of the each performance, the performer must re-embrace the character (to go back into the closet) in order to reproduce the impact of "coming out." In order for the "coming out" at the end of the play to have an impact, the audience must be persuaded that this character is not already out. The illusion of closetedness involved in the performance must be invoked so that the "true" subject can be manifested through an emancipatory "coming out." Closetedness, rather than a presumptive heterosexuality, emerges as the default subject state. This confusion tends to draw attention to the performative quality of sexual identity, that a subject's identity is dependent on certain reiterative actions and that even those within the audience who may have already publicly identified as gay will need to continuously reassert that identity. Such a staging of "coming out" also serves to construct a particular relationship with the audience that presumes that those watching are primarily closeted, or suffer from the pernicious danger of being presumptively closeted by others. This kind of interaction argues that those within the audience who are already "out" will benefit from the staging of such narratives because they will find themselves called upon to continuously re-enact that moment in their own lives.

Writing in resistance to the notion that that queer theatre consists primarily of preaching to the converted (a response that "assumes queer artists to be didactic and queer audiences to be static") Tim Miller and David Roman argue the value of such evangelism, arguing that the rhetoric of "preaching to the converted" acts to negate the terror of homophobia and diminish the value of political and social visibility and stability. Instead, Miller and Roman argue that the "converted" are never wholly so but are involved in a lifelong project of continuous self-identification and

revelations.[138] In the case of Mister X, the performance might be seen to address a community of those who identify as gay and an overlapping but not identical community of those who have come out. Though the methodology of conversion might appear to turn on a singular act of "coming out," the theatrical representation of that practice is rooted in a stadial process of repetition and reproduction. Though such performances describe a narrative rather than a singular event, the cumulative impact constructs the means of a stable self-recognition that counters an assumption of universal or default heterosexuality.

While Gay Sweatshop's work might have had an intended primary audience of gay men and women, such a focus cannot be read as a methodical exclusion of the perspectives of heterosexual audience members. A survey produced by a Central London Polytechnic student during the ICA lunchtime season in 1976 found that audience members "were drawn 50/50 to 60/40 from the homosexual and heterosexual communities" (GS/3/3/1/4) – suggesting that the role of the audience as a sympathetic party to the construction of legitimate non-heterosexual identities was not dependent on that audience's identification as unanimously non-heterosexual. The process of "working some change" in the audiences of Gay Sweatshop's work recognises an audience which did not have a homogenous composition.

While Gay Sweatshop's work might demonstrate a central effort to broaden the spectrum of representations of non-heterosexual identities, that effort was not exclusively intended to allow gay audience members to identify with characters who were not stereotypes and to engage in reciprocal acts of "coming out." Such representations also directly challenged narrow or fixed conceptions of homosexual identity held by heterosexual and homosexual audience members alike through the presentation of a register of difference that was not dependent upon normativity – that is to say, a realisation that a perception of difference between straight and gay people does not mean that each of those groups is internally identical.

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[138] Tim Miller and David Roman, "Preaching to the Converted," Theatre Journal 47.2 (May 1995): 172-3.

While "[t]he idea of 'the unconverted' assumes an inert mass of people which absorbs a performance uncritically and passively, without explicit interaction, and with immediate approval of the representation imbedded in the performance,"[139] Gay Sweatshop's work describes a confrontational dynamic which, on occasion, provoked an immediate challenge to the claim on representation itself. The first tour of Mister X provoked a series of extra-theatrical actions:

> As soon as [the play] started some people in the front row led by the Revd Edward Walton from the neighbouring Christ Church in Hendon stood up and called down the wrath of God on the actors and the Unitarian Minister who had booked the show. They produced from under their chairs placards which they had conveniently brought with them and which said things like, 'Man Shall Not Lie With Man.'
>
> The company tried to start the play three times and it became almost like a pantomime with the actors asking the audience if they wanted the play to begin and the bulk of the audience saying 'Yes, we do,' but the protestors bellowing back, 'Oh no, we don't.'[140]

A performance at the Traverse in Edinburgh, Scotland (a country in which homosexuality was still illegal) provoked a consultation from the Procurator Fiscal to see if the performance constituted a homosexual act. When Any Woman Can and Mister X were performed at the Projects Arts Centre in Dublin in 1976, a theatre review describing the plays as "propagandist in the most crudely offensive manner"[141] led to a campaign to cut public funding from the venue. Under pressure from groups including The League of Decency, Parent Concern and The Society to Outlaw Pornography, the amenities committee of the local government council suspended and later withdrew Project Arts Centre's grant.

This context of protest may have acted to heighten the dynamic between performers and audience, drawing attention to the social, political and religious structures against which the effort to legitimise and broaden the representation of non-heterosexual identities was set. Though the presence of homophobic opposition might have acted to confirm the necessity or value of a collective action, such

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[139] Miller and Roman 177.
[140] Osment xxii.
[141] Osment xxii.

opposition could also have acted to intimidate: to make the rationale of "coming out" clearer and yet harder to adopt.

Terms of Success

The Gay Sweatshop's primary work was founded on the assumption that existing narrow and often homophobic representations of non-heterosexual lives could be challenged from within a system marked by institutionalised prejudice. Despite a tradition of oppression and self-oppression within the traditional theatrical community, alternative representations could be produced by that same system which would act to counter that structure. The guarantee that such representations would be able to escape the limitations of earlier stereotypes was found through a direct claim on the Real – that is, the lives of performers whose personal histories and presence could be directly transcribed into scripts and performances. Real gay people would perform real gay parts; by definition, the representations they produced would be "truthful." The central focus on "coming out" would confirm that legitimacy and provide the means for a self-reproducing community that would encourage others, in turn, to come out.

Gay Sweatshop's most effective work may have emerged from those strategies which allowed a successful negotiation of the territory between lived experience and theatrical performance that did not make a direct claim on naturalism. Any link that was being asserted between performers and the characters they performed did not mask the scenarios within which those characters moved and instead directed critical attention to the social and political context of those narratives. Gay Sweatshop's performative conventions were tailored to specific ends – most significantly toward the issue of the self-oppression of non-heterosexual subjects. Separated from that agenda – in itself a product of a particular generation of political and social action – and stripped of specific functionality, such strategies become more problematic.

While gay performers playing gay parts might invoke an emotional and political investment in the production of authentic characters, that relationship does not guarantee access to the Real. Furthermore, the emphasis on that claim might act to

focus attention on the individual lives of the characters, inviting a politics of individual identification to the detriment of an examination of the circumstances that made such acts of personal recuperation necessary. While a process of identification might aid the successful construction of personal legitimacy – the recognition of one's own status as a gay woman or man – the terms on which that identification was made available could remain unchallenged.

Chapter 4: AIDS theatre and the demands of the Real

The advent of AIDS in the UK presented a specific context in which identification as a gay man or woman – or with any non-heterosexual identity – operated as a public political issue. Though such identification remained wedded to a process of personal realisation and filiation, the representation and regulation of the bodies such subjects might inhabit became the focus of mainstream political processes. Recognition of that change of context allows a reiteration of earlier issues: particularly how particular performative strategies might serve to represent non-heterosexual subjects, not only in the staging of the biographical narratives of lesbian and gay lives but in an account of the materiality of those lives. In a sense, the advent of AIDS marked a moment in queer activism when even a tentative separation of biography and materiality was no longer viable – and that a failure to address the material body might have terminal consequences. While earlier forms of activist performance drew on strategies which sought primarily to confirm the legitimacy and visibility of non-heterosexual subjects, that project was overtaken by the necessity and urgency of political agency – suggesting that the project to secure personal representation and identity had not yet secured political power or legitimacy. In particular, the advent of AIDS complicated prior claims on self-identification through the reinstatement of a largely historical framing of homosexuality in terms of illness and disease, creating a logic of homophobia founded on an apparent threat to public health and safety that crystallised existing fears based in religious morality and cultural normativity.

This chapter will consider the development of particular performativities that developed in response to HIV and AIDS, examining how existing theoretical and aesthetic accounts of the body – and concurrent claims on the representation of the Real – were adapted or abandoned during the 1980s. To that end, discussion of Tony Kushner's Angels in America will recognise a cultural, historical crisis as a crisis of the material body. The refusal to recognise the spread of AIDS, or to account for subjects living in AIDS-marked bodies, is no mere political inconvenience or theoretical impasse; rather, Kushner's work argues the dire, mortal consequence of a body rendered unrepresentable. Concurrently, performance artist Ron Athey's work will suggest the possibilities of a persistent material body, marked by AIDS and

made accessible through existing ritual frameworks – a kind of re-entry of the material Real through the manipulation of the symbolic. Though Kushner and Athey both originate from a US rather than British background, their work reflects a European, Brechtian heritage of performance; Angels in America has been successfully staged within the UK on several occasions,[142] and Kushner himself has expressed an interest in British performance – particularly, the work of Caryl Churchill.[143] More importantly, Kushner and Athey's work describes a transition of AIDS that has been shared by both the US and the UK: from a terminal disease to something approaching a chronic condition – that AIDS is not the end of a particular narrative (in which, for example, AIDS is a divine punishment for a particular group of people) but an ongoing process, a discourse produced and inhabited by subjects whose constituency persists (and is confirmed) through perpetual challenge. As such, their work describes the environment from which Aputheatre (a British company founded as the AIDS Positive Underground Theatre company and discussed below) emerged.

Preceding that discussion of specific texts and performances is a recognition of an effort to deconstruct the (re)pathologising or (re)medicalisation of non-heterosexual identities. That deconstructive effort is in turn understood as a potential retreat from certain political and material realities, recognising that the separation of HIV/AIDS from homosexual identity might act to deny the knowledge that HIV/AIDS has had and continues to have a disproportionate impact on the gay male community. Cutting across that disputed sense of community, then, are competing claims of responsibility, filiation and permanence. Amongst the questions that arise from Kushner and Athey's work is the viability or usefulness of a (political and performative) queer notion of fluidity when faced with a virus which, in its commandeering of a body's immune system, becomes a part of that body's functioning and acquires an apparently indelible physical presence. If HIV/AIDS is

[142] Angels in America was first staged in the UK at The National Theatre: Millennium Approaches in 1992 followed by Perestroika in 1993, which won the Evening Standard Best Play award. The Scottish company 7:84 also staged the sequence in 1996.

[143] Kushner is most often quoted as having described Churchill as "the greatest living English playwright," praise which has been used to promote several of Churchill's published works. For instance, see the Theatre Communications Group publication of A Number (2003).

to be a read as an irrefutable challenge to queer fluidity – an indelible marking of the subject, an onslaught of the Real which cannot be fully represented – it may be useful to describe a form of performativity which redirects the body as the site of subjectivity and of desire into an alternative form. It is also appropriate to consider if there might be a relationship between a queer notion of fluidity and the apparent unrepresentability of an HIV/AIDS-marked body as an encounter with the Real. Furthermore, if such a reformulation is viable, it is necessary to consider what function it might serve.

The broader question of the relationship between HIV/AIDS and the lesbian and gay community has been substantially discussed and documented, approaching that history through a variety of forms: histories of activist groups, analyses of community and health workers as well as accounts of political decision made at regional and national levels that affected funding for research and treatment, to name only a few. Additional research has focussed on the depiction of HIV/AIDS in national media sources, including publicly funded sexual health campaigns and other governmental material. This discussion will not seek to reproduce that body of research here and, in seeking to avoid a survey account of past and existing HIV/AIDS theatre, instead seeks to pose more specifically queer lines of interrogation that occasionally draw upon these other modes of enquiry.

Furthermore, the logic of any Brechtian "solution" to an illusion of totality – a mimesis that claims a truth in its representation through a parity between the image it presents and the subject that image is taken to signify – will be assessed as a performativity of the body which is read primarily within a linguistic field. In response, it becomes important to re-emphasise the notion of the performative which argues that the material body and the linguistic or symbolic field are not separate, distinct discourses and to recognise the forms that interdependence between verbal and material fields might produce. Such an effort recognises potential limitations in the performative strategies in the preceding chapters, insofar as a reading of the material body is passed over for an examination of the political or social context of that body - a critique which recognises a broadly Lacanian framework that in turn

presumes the body itself to be "unreadable," where entry into symbolic systems of representation is always marked by an abandonment, disavowal and loss of bodily signification.

That line of enquiry might then turn to Julia Kristeva's definition of the semiotic, "understood in its etymological rather than its Saussurian sense: 'distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof.'" The Saussurian semiotic is an analysis of the symbolic systems of language; Kristeva's semiotic precedes as the raw material of signification: "the corporeal, libidinal matter that must be harnessed and appropriately channelled for social cohesion and regulation."[144]

The pursuit of such an interplay between a material reading of the body and a notion of the linguistic field allows the deconstruction of a theoretical distinction between linguistic and bodily interaction, instead seeking to describe how the notion of performativity presents an argument against the mutual exclusivity of those categories. Such enquiry suggests certain performative consequences and strategies arising from a dialectic between "social cohesion and regulation" and the apparent crisis of a singular subject:

> The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh exposes us to the gaze of others, but also to touch and to violence, and bodies put us at the risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all those as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever our own. The body has its invariably public dimension.[145]

Within the terms of this discussion, that public dimension is primarily (but not exclusively) marked by the forms of performance – both strategies and particular texts – that have arisen since the appearance of HIV/AIDS.

Representation and Necessity

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[144] Grosz 150.
[145] Judith Butler, Precarious Life (London: Verso, 2004) 26.

For a large number of predominantly lesbian and gay theatre practitioners, the AIDS crisis has come to describe a historical moment which crystallised existing prejudices and forced to issue the material consequences of issues that had been tolerated or rendered theoretical. Tony Kushner's Angels in America narrativises a refocusing of the political necessity of representation, heightened by an awareness that there are

> life and death consequences to homophobia. We always knew that. There was always gay bashing and bloodshed and emotional violence; but it's not until you realize that people are simply willing to let hundreds of thousands of people die and not extend simple human compassion, that you realize how deep the hatred goes.[146]

The often wilful inability of state and local politics to account for the HIV/AIDS marked body is rendered as both symbolic and literal violence, ignorance of and malevolence directed towards a specific community in need amounting to dire neglect. Interviewed by Adam Mars Jones during the National Theatre production of Millennium Approaches, Kushner stated that his intentions were to make more "overt the politics that our relationships are always riven with," to assert a connection between "personal dynamics and questions of relationships with the political issues that are of such tremendous significance to the lives of gay men and women."[147] It would appear that one of the methods at work in Angels in America proceeds by writing a crisis of the individual (body) into that of a community, challenging the grounds on which such community is constructed. There is perhaps here the resemblance of the older, classical discourse that Susan Sontag identifies in AIDS and its Metaphors: that of the body as a microcosm of the state, wherein the threat of disease to the individual body translates into the endangerment of the state.

Sontag describes a "dual metaphoric genealogy" for AIDS, at one level read as a cancer, an invasion, but more closely through the transmission of the disease, "an older metaphor, reminiscent of syphilis, is invoked: pollution."[148] This genealogy

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[146] Adam Mars Jones, "Tony Kushner at the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain," Tony Kushner in Conversation, ed. Robert Vorlicky (University of Michigan Press, 1998) 20.
[147] Jones 18-19.
[148] Susan Sontag, AIDS and its Metaphors (London: Allen Lance, 1989) 17.

also marks the recurring pathology of non-heterosexual activity and identity that Foucault identified in The History of Sexuality:

> since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it – as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom – in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behaviour.[149]

The construction of identity is rendered symptomatic; that is to say that there is a progression from individual and potentially disparate symptoms to the image of a coherent subject, now a confirmable "medical object." A consequence of the logic described here is that the potentially non-identical or discontinuous community of gay, lesbian and other non-heterosexual identities acquires a new political constituency, wherein "the war against disease" implements the way in which

> particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien "other", as enemies are in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of blame to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if the patients are thought of as victims. Victims suggest innocence. And innocence, by the inexorable logic that governs all relational terms, suggests guilt.[150]

Kushner's plays might be said, then, to articulate in part the movement from subject designation to political signification within the AIDS crisis, realising the notion that such signifiers are not descriptive, "that is, they do not represent pregiven constituencies, but are empty signs which come to bear phantasmatic investments of various kinds."[151] It could follow that the narrative of Angels in America is intended to be read at the level of the individuated subject in order to make apparent the construction of personal investments that construe a public self at the level of public, political discourse.

However, that metaphorical transition from the subject to the state implies a coherent, closed symbolic exchange which in turn might also suggest a naturalist theatrical microcosm. One problem apparent in aligning the body and the body

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[149] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1978) 44.
[150] Sontag, AIDS and its Metaphors 11.
[151] Butler, Bodies That Matter 191.

politic in such a manner is that it presumes Kushner's characters may unproblematically be taken as representative of state. However, many of Kushner's characters take the form of social or political outcasts, pre-emptively set aside from the body politic as pariahs – marked through homosexuality or Judaism, to which HIV/AIDS joins as a further manifestation of an existing symptomology. Even Roy Cohn (positioned at what might be considered to be the centre of the legal and social systems that police cultural legitimacy) appears in a liminal position amongst his fellow lawyers: he plays too hard, too fast, he cuts too many corners and steals from his clients. Though feared and admired, his descent into illness during Perestroika permits Cohn's disbarment and the appearance of a loathing that has barely been kept in check:

> Ethel One of the main guys on the Executive leaned over to his friend and said, 'Finally. I've hated that little faggot for thirty-six years.'[152]

Rather than acting as symbolic representatives of state, as Sontag's metaphor might imply, Kushner's characters appear to be part of a Benjaminian methodology of *stillstellung*, which connotes an objective interruption of a mechanical process. Instead of articulating a particular historical narrative, Kushner's characters present the disruption of those narratives as discrete, stable systems.

Kushner consciously expands on a Brechtian legacy, exhibiting a relationship between the body and the body politic that extends beyond Sontag's symbolist metaphor. Kushner's angels take shape as a refiguring of Benjamin's "Angel of History":

> The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm in blowing from paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the

[152] Tony Kushner, Angels in America Part Two: Perestroika (London: Nick Hearne Books, 1995). 4.9. Further citations are given in-text.

> future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm.[153]

Kushner's council of Angels, each representing a great "principality" of Earth, sit in a ruined chamber – presented in the 2004 television adaptation for the US cable network HBO as part of a decaying, though beautiful, San Francisco – scrying dimly for future disasters but unable to intercede. The rubble heap grows higher, and The Angel of the Principality of America can only will his/her prophet against further movement:

> Forsake the Open Road:
> Neither Mix nor Intermarry: Let Deep Roots Grow:
> If you do not MINGLE you will Cease to Progress:
> Seek Not to Fathom the World and its Delicate Particle Logic:
> You cannot Understand, You can only Destroy,
> You do not Advance, You Only Trample.
>
> (Perestroika, 2.2)

But forward movement is unavoidable – "progress, migration, motion… is modernity" – and we are left with an attempt to reconcile the inevitable irresistible urge to move forward and the ruins that such movement stands on. The structure of Angels in America operates to interrupt the process of that movement – unable to disrupt permanently, but instead seeking to draw attention to the historical processes at work. There is an attempt to perform a kind of archaeology that recognises that the spoils of cultural heritage are also the bones of the dead. Correspondingly, there emerges the potential for the HIV/AIDS-marked body to return through a rather different metaphor, of attempting to construct a means of living in the ruins of what has gone before: becoming simultaneously the site of remembrance and death as well as the persistence of a will to live. Outside the central relationship between the Angel and his/her prophet, Prior, this process takes the form of an attempt to render opaque that which is unrepresented, or unrepresentable. This process of "making present" is also intended to force a disclosure of the historical and social processes which

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[153] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," Trans. Dennis Redmond. 2 Jan. 2006 <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html>. Emphasis original.

confirm the legitimacy of certain subjects and masks the possibility of other subjects as legitimate subjectivities at all.

The attempt to confirm and deny certain constituencies recurs throughout Millennium Approaches. Roy Cohn's rejection of homosexual identity and the diagnosis of AIDS is couched in the knowledge of what those signifiers will produce as their referent:

Roy	AIDS. Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe that they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.
Henry	No?
Roy	No. Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? [...] Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissante anti-discrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me, Henry?[154]

Cohn separates sexual acts from sexual identity, re-associating the latter with social and political agency, not least by distancing himself (through third person reference) from the subjectivity he is attempting to define and create: Roy Cohn is not a homosexual; Roy Cohn is a heterosexual who likes to "fuck around" with other guys. Cohn's self-nomination claims his same-sex sexual acts as extensions of homosocial exchange and power, rather than as proof of homosexual desire and identity. His self-nomination also enacts a belief that sufficient control of the symbolic will produce mastery of the semiotic: enacting the presumption that linguistic reference and exchange can produce, account for and control the presence of the material body.

However, Cohn's reattribution of signifiers is predicated on the assumption that particular physical, sexual acts do not contribute to the constitution of the subject as a

[154] Tony Kushner, Angels in America Part One: Millennium Approaches (London: Nick Herne Books, 1995). 1.9. Further citations are provided in-text.

political agent. Cohn's denial of AIDS only functions at a linguistic level, a refusal of the Real through the mode of the symbolic that will prove untenable:

Henry	You have AIDS, Roy.
Roy	No, Henry, no. AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer
	Pause
Henry	Well, whatever the fuck you have, Roy, it's very serious and I haven't got a thing for you [...] because you can call it any damn thing you want, Roy, but what it boils down to is very bad news.

(Millennium Approaches, 1.9)

As the play progresses, Cohn's dialogue becomes increasingly interrupted by intercessions – by betrayals, perhaps – of his body. Wracked by suffocating coughing fits, fevers and lesions, a kind of physical grammar or punctuation of the body writes itself onto him even as he tries to deny its agency. This denial can also be read as an attempt to refuse the capacity of the body to constitute political constituency and agency, or at least an awareness that the register of the body only permits for *certain* subjects to be materialised. In Sontag's genealogical narrative, "to get AIDS is precisely to be revealed, in the majority of cases so far as a member of a certain 'risk group,' a community of pariahs. The illness flushes out an identity that might have remained hidden from neighbours, job-mates, family, friends."[155] A coarse form of identity politics then reads back from the site of infection to determine certain sexual acts as immutable markers of specific forms of sexual identity: Cohn cannot be a heterosexual who has sex with other men; by dint of those sex acts (not even necessarily the one in which he might have contracted HIV) his subject status is confirmed as homosexual – and as a member of a community of danger to others. Consequentially, it may be more productive to suggest that this verbal attempt to refuse an association between certain signifiers, certain subjectivities and the status of the body describes a persistent (and potentially irrefutable) structure. Cohn's denials only serve to enforce an existing vulnerability of the subject to intrusions of the body and the Real.

[155] Sontag, AIDS and its Metaphors 24-25.

I would like to suggest an account of this denial through a more formal sense of foreclosure, as in Butler's argument (following from her reading of Slavoj Žižek) that "what is refused or repudiated in the formation of the subject continues to determine that subject. What remains outside the subject, set outside by the act of foreclosure which founds the subject, persists as a kind of defining negativity."[156] Given that within this broadly Lacanian framework that which remains "outside" as the foreclosed and repressed occupies the same category as the Real, Cohn's AIDS-stricken body persists as something which marks "incompleteness" of his subjectivity – or rather makes apparent an existing and recurrent discontinuity. Cohn's rejection of the body is not a purely ontological dispute; it is rather an expression of the fear that an acknowledgement of the body, which is "the production of the unsymbolizable, the unspeakable, the illegible," is also "always a strategy of *social abjection.*"[157] In this situation, the presence of the body confirms Cohn's status as an unspeakable subject, stigmatized in the narrative of AIDS as a member of a "risk group" – in short, a man with zero clout.

However, I also want to argue that Angels in America goes beyond this account of Cohn's narrative of physical and social disfigurement. That narrative – of fear and anger – appears to be directly related to his own sense of subjectivity prior to becoming ill, based as it is on his role in the suppression and management of homosexuality as the cultural other, in turn loosely based as the character is on a historical figure who participated in many documented cases of legislative homophobia. Cohn's narrative primes us for a series of alternate, overlapping subjects which might be said to describe Kushner's strategy of survival, wherein the body has become a locus for betrayal and abjection though that same body must be recognised and preserved – a persistence, in Kushner's terms, of the will to live.

This potentially radical rewriting of the body as a space where subjectivity is produced by a realignment of desire in terms of both pain and pleasure manifests in

[156] Butler, Bodies That Matter 189-90.
[157] Butler, Bodies That Matter 190. Emphasis added.

terms that appear both alogical and ahistorical – as a challenge to existing systems of cultural narrative and linear progression.

Louis	Rabbi, what does the Holy Writ say about someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need?
Rabbi C.	Why would a person do such a thing?
Louis	Because he has to. Maybe because this person's sense of the world, that is will change for the better with struggle, maybe a person who has this neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress towards happiness or perfection or something, who feels very powerful because he feels connected to these forces, moving uphill all the time… maybe that person can't, um, incorporate sickness into his sense of how things are supposed to be. Maybe vomit… and sores and disease… really frighten him, maybe… he isn't so good with death.
Rabbi C.	The Holy Scriptures have nothing to say about such a person.

(Millennium Approaches, 1.5)

Kushner begins to make the argument that the experience of the AIDS epidemic operates counter to, and outside of, the cultural dialogues that should be able to explain it – and that are traditionally called upon to provide guidance and justification. Louis reads his own abandonment of Prior as proof that such narratives have fallen into disarray and out of usefulness:

Louis	I don't believe in God. I think you should know that before we fuck again. I used to believe but… If there was a God He would've clobbered me by now. I'm the incontrovertible argument against the existence of a just God, or at least against His competence or attentiveness…
Joe	Stop suffering.
Louis	I have no right not to suffer, if I failed to suffer the universe would become unbalanced.

(Perestroika, 1.7)

There is also here an attempt to defuse and detach the advent of AIDS from a narrative of pseudo-religious punishment, of AIDS as the "gay plague."

From this we can develop a notion that this failure to represent operates not just in the sense of explaining motivations and reasons as part of a larger narrative or

scheme, but in the sense that forms like history and organised religion appear unable to render the Real of AIDS into the realm of the symbolic at all. Cohn's crisis is predicated on the presumption that AIDS will be read into a pre-existing structure of homophobia, wherein the status of threat conditioned as plague marks it as the punishment and signifier of a particular group. The critical position offered by Kushner's refusal of existing cultural narratives to fully explain AIDS may be that the situation Cohn describes as the experience of AIDS is in fact a particular fantasy proceeding from existing prejudices, only able to account for HIV/AIDS-marked subjects by writing that particular status into existing categories; it cannot describe anything outside of a tightly defined boundary which prescribes the terms of engagement rather than describing their consequence.

Form, Play and Failure in Representation

I would argue that the sequence of Angels in America – from Millennium Approaches to Perestroika – presents a frustration with the apparent unrepresentability of AIDS. More specifically, the progression of dramatic action is driven by the inability of existing systems of representation to register HIV/AIDS without following pre-existing narratives of plague that describe the product of a lifestyle marked by "risk." This frustration takes the form of self-parody and humour, inserting a sense of self-reflexivity in the path of judgement of a wider cultural narrative. Such reflexivity, manifested here as the active re-imagining of one's own HIV/AID status, becomes the first method of resistance. Prior's symptoms appear to fail in their signification, acting as signifiers that establish a symbolic field for the presence of the body without actually producing or rendering the signified body. In that state of present absence, Prior is left to engage in a kind Derridean play of *differance* that trails off into a line of self-reproducing homonyms:

Prior	I'm a lesionnaire. The Foreign Lesion. The American Lesionnaire's disease.
Louis	Stop.
Prior	My troubles are lesion.

The structure of language as surface play that slides over the material of the Real takes on a further dimension as Prior sits, partially made up, in front of his mirror:

> Prior *he studies his handiwork*
> I look like a corpse. A corpsette. Oh my queen; you know you've hit rock bottom when even drag is a drag.
>
> (Millennium Approaches, 1.4.)

The emphasis here requires a reading of drag as a further extension of playfulness; like Prior's verbal play, drag's transformations of the body are intended to be effortless reformulations and redirections of signification (potentially in deliberate contrast to the high-level artifice and performative convention involved in drag). Here, however, the capacity of the symbolic field to describe and rewrite itself is interrupted by an intercession of the Real. Similarly, in Perestroika, the funeral of a great New York drag and style queen provokes Prior to rails at the disparity between performance and value, "that ludicrous spectacle in there, just a parody of someone who *really* counted." (Perestroika, 2.1)

In a similarly parodic manner, Belize's remedy for Prior mirrors the (then experimental) AZT that Cohn manages to acquire for himself:

> Belize Voodoo cream. From the botanica around the block.
> Prior And you a registered nurse.
> Belize *sniffing it* Beeswax and cheap perfume. Cut with Jergen's Lotion. Full of good vibes and love from some little black Cubana witch in Miami.
> Prior Get that trash away from me, I am immune-suppressed.
> Belize I *am* a health professional. I *know* what I'm doing.
>
> (Millennium Approaches, 2.5[158])

In the absence of any cure, all potential remedies have the same value; a weakened immune system means that medical procedures designed to mediate have the capacity to kill. When Cohn arrives in hospital Belize advises him to refuse the treatment that his doctors will prescribe for his cancer: radiotherapy that will

[158] Emphasis original.

demolish the white cell count of an already compromised immune system. The antiretroviral drug AZT also occupies this disputed space, a neo-classical *pharmakon* that is both medicine and poison – allowing the speculation that a toxic overdose of AZT, the side effects of which include liver damage and the suppression of bone marrow, killed Roy Cohn rather than AIDS. Denied a medicalisation that might create a narrative of definition, containment, defeat and recovery, the discourse of treatment is focussed instead on the capacity of the health professional to define convincing terms; a good placebo becomes the only realistic defence.

Rather than being merely a structural observation, I want to emphasise again that the theoretical crisis of signification described here is being used to give structure and articulation to a material, bodily, political crisis. Kushner's account of "life and death consequences" begins at the border of verbal play which describes tolerance without permitting acceptance:

> Louis ...and what I think is that what AIDS shows us is the limits of tolerance, that it's not enough to be tolerated, because when the shit hits the fan you find out how much tolerance is worth. Nothing. And underneath all the tolerance is intense, passionate hatred.
>
> (Millennium Approaches, 3.3)

It is in response to this almost radical intolerance that we can begin to consider what Kushner describes as a persistence, a will to live of the body that is expressed theatrically through a form of the fantastic, a kind of counter-realism that asserts continuance even on the terms of suffering and persecution that deny the possibility of existence.

Persistence and Attachment

The narrative of Joe and Harper acts out a persistence of attachment that goes beyond necessity or accountability: Harper suffers from an alogical passionate attachment to Joe that cannot be abandoned:

Harper In the whole world, you are the only person, the only person I love or have ever loved. And I love you terribly. Terribly. That's what's so awful, irreducibly real. I can make up anything but I can't dream that away.

(Millennium Approaches, 2.2.)

Interestingly, it appears here that the mark of the authentic Real is expressed in terms of relational desire. The body itself does not signify; signification arises in the absence of a relationship of desire to another body:

Harper I don't understand why I'm not dead. When your heart breaks, you should die.
But there's still the rest of you. There's your breasts, and your genitals, and they're amazingly stupid, like babies or faithful dogs, they don't get it, they just want him. Want him.

(Perestroika, 1.4)

I want to try to describe a threat of irreplaceability, suggested here as the basis of Harper's emotional attachment, in terms of a Derridean singularity, insofar as "to have the experience of one's absolute singularity and apprehend one's death amounts to the same thing."[159] It may be possible to describe in Perestroika a restructuring of subjectivity where the first condition for that subject's constituency is the threat of death, that which:

> is very much that which nobody can undergo or confront in my place. My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, "given," ... by death ... It is from the site of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is, of my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility.[160]

The transition that I am trying to describe here is from death read as an absolute closure of signification (Cohn's refusal of a diagnosis of AIDS is a refusal of a narrative that, for him, ends in social, political and eventually literal death) to death as the space and condition in which materiality persists. Though the passage from Millennium Approaches to Perestroika is marked by schism – the arrival of the

[159] Jacques Derrida, The Gift of Death, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 41.
[160] Derrida 41.

Angel of the Principality of America, the fragmentation of the relationships between Prior and Louis, Harper and Joe – that sense of dissolution is run through with persistent traces of the physical body.

There is the suggestion that a barrier between the symbolic and the semiotic – between language and the material body – has begun to change, not necessarily to dissolve but instead to become apparent, that is, disputable; the terms on which that separation is enacted are approaching visibility. Within the narrative of Angels in America, that conditionality emerges through sex – not necessarily in the disparity between sexual acts and sexual identities – but in the way sexual activity might challenge the site of the body as a secure, bordered, sovereign subject-state. Though the borders of the body can be policed, patrolled and a certain containment can take place, that encirclement of the subject does not necessarily provide for a clean and certain divide.

Joe	Your, uh, boyfriend. He's sick.
Louis	Very. He's not my boyfriend, we… We can cap everything that leaks in latex, we can smear our bodies with nonoxynol-9, safe, chemical sex. Messy, but not dirty.

(Perestroika, 1.2)

Yet despite this suggestion of disputed, "messy" borders even as the body is "capped," the body is also configured as the disputed and potentially contagious territory on which proof of subject status might be secured. If the verbal or symbolic field has failed to convey meaning – or if there is a marked disparity between material sensation and symbolic representation, where material sensations cut across the supposedly immutable borders of the body-as-subject – the body might provide a connection to authenticity and the Real that is apparently lacking.

The capacity of the body to act in this manner is certainly a strategy that has been taken up in the work of contemporary performance artists such as Karen Finley, in which "to take the signifier for the real is to make the signifier the body: this means that there is no space for the signified, for representation. The true-real is the refusal

of embodiment, of discourse."[161] Elin Diamond suggests that Finley's work plays on the sense that "embodiment is both the 'act of embodying,' and the 'condition of being embodied,' just as performance is the immediate act of doing, and the act done." This duality might be said to give an alternative expression to Butler's account of a performative materiality: my body is the product of an iterative performance (my acts of embodying) but is also the means (being embodied) through which that performance takes place. However, as Diamond goes on to observe, Finley's moment of staged abjection, "total expenditure" that might bring her closer to the true Real, is mimetic performance:

> what Finley smears on herself is pudding, not shit. Because this is true performance, not true psychosis, there is still, as Toril Moi puts it, some space for the signified.[162]

Finley's work only approaches through mimesis the possibility of the "torture of the true-real, the body riven by the signifier"; it does not produce the torture in and of itself.

Certainly, Prior's demands of Louis are problematic in a similar way, based on a denial of the security of verbal exchange as proof of emotional attachment, or indeed as proof of anything at all. The only security in signification – that a person means what he or she says – is found through a demand for a material, bodily rendering of meaning:

Louis	I can't have this talk anymore.
Prior	Oh the list of things you can't do. So fragile! Answer me: inside. Bruises?
Louis	Yes.
Prior	Come back to me when they're visible. I want to see black and blue, Louis, I want to see blood. Because I can't believe you even *have* blood in your veins till you show it to me. So don't come near me again, unless you've got something to show.

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[161] Elin Diamond, "The Shudder of Catharsis in Twentieth-Century Performance," Performativity and Performance, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York, London: Routledge, 1995) 165.
[162] Diamond 165-66.

(Perestroika, 4.1)[163]

However, it remains problematic to claim a direct line to the body as the surety of expression; while the irreplaceability of the body might underwrite the success of singularity and "successful" signification, it does not follow that the body would always be necessarily be somehow "honest" or "true." The presence of form does not guarantee content. Prior's demands of Louis are untenable; when Louis returns, bloodied and bruised form his fight with Joe, Prior is shocked by the material proof offered by violence that has been enacted for him. He also refuses it as confirmation of Louis faithfulness: there can be no return to that particular relationship.

Though Kushner himself describes the transition from Millennium Approaches to Perestroika as the arrival of cataclysm ("[a] membrane has broken; there is disarray and debris"[164]), Angels in America appears to challenge the terms by which that membrane was ever constructed; there may, in fact, have only ever been disarray – a continually reproduced dysfunction between material and symbolic subjectivities. Given the manner in which the body appears to persist in terms of desire, one account of this continuum may lie in the notion of ecstasy. While "to be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and thus can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief,"[165] that transportation is frequently predicated on bodily sensation. Ecstatic transcendence becomes an expression of sensation of the body whilst beyond the body, both in terms of Prior's sexual encounters with the Angel, which take the shape of what might be described as material hallucinations (Real but not real), as well as in the form of Cohn's rage at disbarment even as his own body refuses to rise to defend itself. In the place of fixity and death we find a simultaneity and continuity that is non-identical, describing the potential of the symbolic to describe the semiotic, and the capacity of the body to "write back" in moments of passionate, ecstatic disruption.

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[163] Emphasis original.
[164] Kushner, Perestroika, "A Note about the Staging."
[165] Butler, Precarious Life 24. Emphasis original.

Part of the strategy that I am trying to suggest here – a notion of realigning the body within the AIDS crisis as the site of persistence, in which the subject is invoked and re-invoked rather than extinguished – relates to the efforts made by activist groups such as ACT UP to combat the rhetoric of AIDS as a death sentence.

ACT UP, or the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, was formed in March of 1987, "in New York City by a group of people as a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS Crisis."[166] A central part of their work has been to challenge a perceived dominance of "health officials, government researchers, medical bureaucrats, doctors and pharmaceutical company executives," a discourse of expertise that has disempowered people living with AIDS and lessened the ability of those subjects to be recognised as subjects at all:

> Here in the affected communities, our points-of-view were made invisible and our real-world knowledge about the changes that needed to be made to end the crisis, was ignored. Living with AIDS, as we all are in New York City, one of the epicenters of the AIDS pandemic in this country, we are the experts!

As a result, the organisation has remained anti-hierarchical: "every member is a leader," there are no paid staff, only volunteers, and decisions about the organisation are made by the membership in attendance every week at Monday night meetings: "the floor has the final say on all of the organizations business." Though the originating focus of ACT UP was New York City, where a report in late June 2003 estimated 100,000 people are infected with HIV (with as many as one in four being unaware of it), there are now chapters across the US, a European chapter in Paris, as well as ACT UP/ INDIA in Pune. While ACT UP/ New York was the original chapter, it does not act as the headquarters; each group operates autonomously, identified by a common commitment to openness and democracy as well as the use of direct action.

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[166] "ACT UP Working Document," ACT UP New York, 2 Jan. 2006 <http://www.actupny.org/documents/workdoc.html>.

Douglas Crimp, writing in 1992 in the wake of the death of Vito Russo, a well known ACT UP activist, suggested that an ongoing issues for the group had become the difficulty of sustaining the "rhetoric of hope we invented and depended upon – a rhetoric of 'living with AIDS,' in which 'AIDS is not a death sentence,' but rather 'a chronic manageable illness.'"[167] Crimp pointed to the deaths from AIDS of several high-profile members of ACT UP; while medical developments have allowed many cases to be rendered chronic, the threat of fatal consequences has not yet been removed.

Crimp also articulates a change in political landscape – primarily in terms of a shift from a Reagan White House to one under the first Bush Administration – that suggests the normalisation of AIDS. Whilst once ignored, the revised political situation presents the problem where AIDS may now have become one on a long list of supposedly intractable social problems: "How often do we hear the list recited: poverty, crime, drugs or homelessness, and AIDS? AIDS is no longer an emergency. It's merely a permanent disaster."[168]

While the actions and rhetoric of ACT UP were initiated and designed to work within a specifically American context, the discourse that the politics of ACT UP describes has a global familiarity – not least because of the chapters using similar strategies found in both Europe and Asia. It is possible to consider the early response of the UK government to the appearance of HIV/AIDS in relation to ACT UP's desire to re-activate the agency of the HIV-affected subject. Virginia Beveridge's substantial study of changing social policy, AIDS in the UK, describes subtle changes in the discourse defining gay men and women in relation to AIDS risk. In the guidelines circulated by the Blood Transfusion Service we can see a gradual shift in the terms used to define a subject at risk – that is, a subject who might contract HIV/AIDS and then donate infected blood:

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[167] Douglas Crimp, "Right On, Girlfriend!," Social Text 33 (1992): 4.
[168] Crimp 5.

> From 1985-6 the wording used gradually became more specific in its advice. In January 1985, it still requested only that "practising homosexual and bisexual men" refrain from donating blood. A third leaflet, issued in September 1985, informed donors that their blood would not be used before it has been tested for antibodies to HIV and required consent for this. A fourth leaflet from September 1986 redefined the high risk categories and specifically aimed to dissuade "men who have had sex with another man since 1978" from giving blood.[169]

Two issues are of concern here – firstly, that the methods practised by activist and performance groups to redefine the culturally circulated identity of AIDS and the AIDS-affected subject operate within a fluid discourse; secondly, the response of governments and health agencies has itself changed over time and depends frequently on the specific makeup of the local political and health care apparatus. As in the narrative of "normalization," the response of the UK government has been (perhaps not illogically) to integrate a response to AIDS into a larger policy of health care provision, which includes changes to services like that of blood transfusion.

It is also significant that groups like ACT UP operate most successfully in cities and urban areas where a density of gay men and women means that they have a substantial political presence – as individuals paying tax, voting and running for office. The second issue is that in seeking to rearticulate the terms in which we describe AIDS and AIDS-affected subjects we might still need to consider some very persistent political and material borders. This is not intended to form the basis of an argument against action to readdress the inequalities and homophobias that have become all the more punitive during the AIDS crisis, or indeed to suggest that changes like those in the guidelines for blood donation centres might not contribute to those traumas but to seek a continual examination of the terms and conditions of the action designed as a response. If AIDS is survivable, what form does that survival take, given that it is still bordered by the threat of death? When someone who has been living with AIDS dies, is that a *death from AIDS* that was always inevitable or was it merely *death* which is inevitable?

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[169] Virginia Beveridge, AIDS in the UK: The Making of Policy, 1981-1994 (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 48.

One performer whose work has sought to question the status of those living with AIDS is Ron Athey, whose representations of excess offer "a number of provocative means of resisting traditional representations of masculinity, pain, and pleasure as well as people living with AIDS or HIV infection."[170] Mary Richards places Athey's work in contrast to populist "AIDS plays," such as Kushner's Angels in America sequence, where "such popular success [...] probably contributed to the public perception of A.I.D.S. as a white, gay man's disease as it was white, gay, men who were primarily represented on stage and were responsible for the staging of these works, as well as making up a large component of the audience who attended." Richards goes further to suggest that the success of Angels in America "may in part have been due to the fact that they did not confront the viewer with the 'ugliness' of illness. That is, in an attempt to work against connotations that conflate gay sexuality with sexual perversity (in its popular negative sense) and sickness, considerable effort was made only to present 'positive' images of gay men."[171]

This criticism of Kushner's work should perhaps be carefully considered: amongst those "positive" images, Kushner also presents Roy Cohn and directs us to the legal justifications and constructions of homophobia in which the historical person he represents participated. Though Louis is potentially redeemed through suffering after he abandons Prior, he is not and cannot be entirely forgiven: Prior tells Louis "[...] you can't come back. Not ever. I'm sorry but you can't." (Perestroika, 5.9) Furthermore, I would argue that Richard's contrasting of Athey's "fringe" performances versus Kushner's "populist" success is misleading as it does not, at the very least, recognise that Kushner and Athey do not experiment with the same performative techniques or engage with the same political material. Kushner and Athey pursue different routes to different ends; a direct comparison of their work that expects fundamental similarities seeks that which does not necessarily exist.

Surface Tension

[170] Mary Richards, "Ron Athey, A.I.D.S. and the Politics of Pain," Body, Space & Technology 3.2. 21 Jan 2006 <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0302/maryrichards.html>.
[171] Richards, "Ron Athey, A.I.D.S. and the Politics of Pain."

If we were to follow a line of criticism consistent with that which Richards suggests, we might observe that while Kushner presents a narrative of the fantastic as a means of reconfiguring (and maybe escaping) the experience of the AIDS marked body, "by contrast, Ron Athey presents an uncensored version of what he understands to be the 'reality' of sickness, perhaps haunted by the horror of his own physical fragility in the face of this virus."[172] However, if Kushner's depiction of illness is "carefully staged in order to make the 'reality' of AIDS,"[173] what is to be made of Athey's specific and deliberate staging choices of costumes and props, not least of which is the controlled presentation of his own AIDS marked body? The contrast that I am trying to deconstruct here is the notion of naturalist-populist theatre on one side, which depends on a kind of coy artifice which diminishes the "truthful" presence of the body, and a theatre of absolute materiality on the other, the integrity of which is secured by a somehow untranslated body. While it might appear that Athey's work is predicated on a form of unrelenting realism – a performativity that does not draw back from or seek to overwrite his body – that performance is played out within a heavily marked field of staged ritual. He

> presents his own infected body and performs upon it. He displays his pierced and tattooed skin, dresses in rubber and leather, wraps himself and others in plastic, whips and is whipped in quasi-religious rituals ... like Christ and then like St. Sebastian, his body dripping onto the plastic covered floor.[174]

Athey's body becomes the site of his performance; however, while self-referencing, his body does not represent the totality of the performance. Though Athey might perform a "solo suicide scene, inserting 16 large-gauge hypodermic needles in a geometric pattern up his arm and attacking his face with a needle the size of a stiletto,"[175] it is a performed tableau designed for an audience; it is no longer a private, potentially sacred communion with the self but a *reproducible process* dependent on an audience reading the symbols and gestures produced.

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[172] Richards, "Ron Athey, A.I.D.S. and the Politics of Pain."
[173] Richards, "Ron Athey, A.I.D.S. and the Politics of Pain."
[174] John Edward McGrath, "Trusting in Rubber: Performing Boundaries during the AIDS Epidemic," TDR 39.2 (Summer 1995): 23.
[175] Ron Athey, "Biography," Home page, 14. Jan 2005 <http://www.ronathey.com/>.

At one level, Athey's work operates as an attempt to revisit the site of self-sacrifice to reclaim the traumas of a dysfunctional childhood:

> Raised in an extremely dysfunctional Pentecostal household the young Ronnie Lee was sainted as a young prophet messiah who proselytized in tongues, and whose tears were coveted by the entire congregation. The adoration bestowed on him in the revival tent did little to alleviate the daily nightmares heaped upon him as the unwitting victim of his mother's schizophrenia, his aunt's hyper-sexualised insanity and his grandmother's channelling of other worldly spectres.[176]

However, this recuperation is dependent on interaction with a symbolic field, confusing any clean division between a "truthful" body and the correspondingly treacherous surrogates of language. Athey's manipulation of religious and secular (particularly medical) iconography may even take the form of a theatrical "speaking in tongues," a purposefully disruptive performative invocation of a glossolalia (random vowels and consonants) that resists direct interpretation and demands individuated attempts to draw specific meaning or sense. Athey's body is rendered through communally recognised imagery and is presented as such to challenge or deny the meanings of those images as a means to reading his body.

Athey's intention to "reclaim through passion and ritual, the violations he had previously committed against himself in anger and frustration" is dependent on a degree of separation between his prior religious beliefs and their iconography as he wields it in his performances. He presents the image of a crown of thorns, built from needles inserted into his scalp, as a secular rewriting of his own self flagellation, "not simply as revenge or repetition of the crimes committed, but in celebration as ritual to all that has been wilfully overcome."[177] While the experience of piercing and blood-letting might be "real" insofar as he physically punctures himself, the iconography that Athey draws upon to stage those rituals (particularly in the case of Martyrs and Saints) draws attention to the very performativity of those acts. These are not desperate, uncontrolled acts of frustration but staged, controlled displays of exorcism and "cauterisation" intended to deconstruct the sexual and religious

[176] Ron Athey, "Biography."
[177] Ron Athey, "Biography."

imagery that sustains them. In those terms, Athey's work could even be characterised as closer to a supposed naturalism than Kushner's, though this too is slightly misleading. The omni-presence of Athey's body might rather suggest a form of hyper-naturalism that moves beyond externalised costume and set to instead stage the illusion of reality – which practice naturalistic misdirections to insist that the suffering you are seeing is real – on his own frame.

I would argue that Athey's work proceeds by challenging the efficacy of certain symbolic fields to account for this body; this does not, however, amount to a denial and separation from linguistic signification and an exclusive bid for a material Real. Instead, Athey's body becomes the means of interrogating a closed symbolic system that diminishes the capacity for that body to exercise agency. In "Trusting in Rubber: Performing Boundaries during the AIDS Epidemic," John Edward McGrath reads in Athey's performance "the way in which it constructs a space for the HIV-positive person, asserting pleasure, perversity, and spirituality within the context of a privileged understanding [...]. [H]e will not structure his experiences around a telos of being rescued."[178] The reclamation of the body in Athey's work appears to demand a concurrent challenge to other discourse or narratives that compete to define it; the call to make AIDS survivable involves a relationship to existing systems of power that might sustain the body but at the cost of surrendering that body as the site of exclusive subjectivity and instead rendering it as socially, medically and politically negotiated property.

Athey's work may suggest that such a negotiated agency is untenable: dressed as a "drag nurse [Athey] screams into a distorted microphone [...]. You cannot quite hear what he is saying (his lips are sewn together) but among other things he seems to be screaming 'Give up on an AIDS cure.'"[179] The pursuit of a cure fits only within an established metaphor of clean versus diseased that feeds into other binaries, of safe sex versus dangerous sex, hetero-sex versus homo-sex. McGrath instead proposes an alternative form of the body as the site of desire, where "to engage in that which

[178] McGrath 25.
[179] McGrath 24.

requires prophylaxis has become the site of desire. Give up on an AIDS cure, and forget the never-was Eden of a disease-free abandon."[180]

Aputheatre

A company working to describe the construction of the HIV/AIDS-marked body as one in which a successful subjectivity might be constructed (again, it should be noted, with different objectives and methodologies to either Kushner or Athey) is the AIDS Positive Underground (APU) Theatre Company. Formed in 1989 at the Sussex AIDS Centre in Brighton, the company had the objective of providing "a cultural response to HIV and AIDS."[181] Working within the Brighton gay community and with a close association to Sussex Aids Centre, APU Theatre Company's work enjoyed literal and performative proximity to the subjects they sought to portray. Their first work, Cry Celibate Tears, was staged initially in the Brighton Arts Festival in 1989 before touring to the Edinburgh Festival. The company returned in 1990 with a production called Ice Pick, which won Brighton's Festival Award for Best Play. Cry Celibate Tears and Ice Pick later formed a trilogy of plays by John Roman Baker (previously of Gay Sweatshop) when they were performed with Freedom to Party at the Brighton Arts Festival in 1992. The poster for the trilogy boasts quotes from both the Edinburgh Festival Times ("Committed theatre at its most vital") and Derek Jarman ("Guaranteed to outrage the bigots").[182]

Working primarily in the UK until 1997, the company's founders – John Roman Baker and Rod Evan – then moved to Amsterdam, where they continue to produce new plays, enjoying a working relationship with the Cultural Ontspannings Centrum (COC) Amsterdam organisation. It is interesting to note that the objectives of the group have broadened considerably. Working under the revised company name Aputheatre, Baker's manifesto defines a response to the situation where "gay politics is dead or dying, and the possibilities of gay consumption endless," describing a

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[180] McGrath 30.
[181] "Aputheatre – a history," Aputheatre 13 Nov. 2004 <http://www.aputheatre.com/apuhistory.htm>.
[182] "Aputheatre poster: Crying Celibate Tears Trilogy," 14 Nov. 2004 <http://www.homoculture.com/poster5.htm>.

repositioning of non-heterosexual identity at the centre of a European cultural landscape:

> We as homosexuals are complete in ourselves, a mirror reflecting back at society's current mediocrity of purpose. We are not idiots of amusing pleasure for the heterosexual, providing frivolous entertainment, neither are we machines of alternative sexual pleasure for ourselves. We are a tribe within a larger tribe facing specific situations of homophobia and homophobic rage in many countries of the world. We are a people who can use image and language in a culture that can only accept our language as monetary or sexual excess.
>
> At this moment in homosexual history we have the opportunity to ask valid questions of how we want to be perceived and how we perceive ourselves. Again, theatre and film are ideal media for this questioning. Rejecting homophobic stereotypes of ourselves we may find we are in a constant year zero, over and over, repeating to the deaf that money is not our sole objective, nor are our party club orgasms. If we can get this point across and this point alone then other points may well follow.[183]

The politic described within this manifesto might be seen to place the ACT UP slogan, "AIDS is a political crisis," within a network of other cultural issues of desire and consumption. The crisis of AIDS is not a liminal, restricted crisis – though it might impact most heavily on a specific and identifiable group – it is instead part of a larger, historical moment. Again, there are perhaps similarities to the methodology suggested in Angels in America, subtitled "A Gay Fantasia on *National Themes*" (my emphasis), which places a narrative of AIDS within a history of American Republicanism and Reaganite politics. The demand for "realism" is not merely directed at the presentation of the body, but at the political context and consequences of that body.

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[183] John Roman Baker, "To Have A Homosexual Conscience," Aputheatre 13 Nov. 2004 <http://www.aputheatre.com/manifesto.htm>.

Aputheatre's demand for the regeneration of a politically active lesbian and gay community situates Athey and Kushner's work within an activism of self-determination. Echoing Gay Sweatshop's desire to challenge control of the reproduction of images of homosexuality within mainstream entertainment, Aputheatre resists a complacency born of limited acceptance and prosperity. This claim on respectability might be criticised as an attempt to police non-heterosexual identities – as in Peter Tatchell's identification of a social contract (discussed below) for "good gays" whose normative and inoffensive behaviour is rewarded with formal recognition and protection. Yet preceding that discussion of a tension between activism and mainstream political activity through performance is an awareness of queer work left "undone," of attitudes towards sex and identity yet to be challenged. Such an awareness – of perceived shortcomings, of the geographically and politically specific territory of legitimacy – directs this discussion to question similar blind-spots within its own methodology.

If a queer critical agenda seeks to challenge, rewrite and destabilise the illusion of permanency and originality in dominant cultural forms, it proceeds by presuming that all cultural values are open to similar forms of deconstructive reading whereby the systems of power that determine those values might be revealed. While specific strategies might appear more effective than others in the interrogation of particular fields of signification, such an approach does not signal a fundamental ontological distinction between, for example, the cultural constructions of race or class. A difficulty then arises as how to discuss such cultural fields without merely collapsing them into a homogenous register of difference, leading to the situation whereby even "alternative" subjects are presented in terms that derive exclusively from a whole, "original" subject. It is thus perhaps essential to reserve a sense of historical and cultural specificity, to present a heterogeneous sense of difference.

That specificity might best be achieved through a focus on the specific cultural fantasies of desire which make a claim to permanency, originality and the Real. In

this context, the notion of "fantasy" is understood as the system of cultural values and imagery which denotes potential objects of desire – and in turn available or legitimate subject categories. In other words, fantasies mark both our objects of desire and define the forms our desire might take. Then, through the Lacanian sense of desiring and wanting to be desired, these fantasies inform the subject states that we might occupy. The realisation of desire does not "consist in its being 'fulfilled,' 'fully satisfied,' it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire."[183] Desire and fantasy are extensions of the same discursive field.

In continuing this reading of cultural production, it is apparent that it will not be productive to think of race as an adjunct of what we recognise as sexual subjectivity, nor sexual identity as a subset of race; presented in similar terms to sex and sexuality – that is, as a complete, coherent state – our sense of racial identity should be recognised as a concept constructed in competition and collusion with our sense of sexual identity. Racial fantasies, though culturally specific, are not hermetically sealed systems of signification: they borrow and conflict with "neighbouring" systems of signification even though they are intended to represent – in the same manner as the discourse of sex – fixed, immutable categories. Expressed most directly, this chapter seeks to explore though a discussion of various performance conventions how a notion of heterosexuality as fixed and original is dependent on a historically specific sense of sexual and racial alterity for the structure and boundaries of its meaning.

To that purpose, a discussion of the text and production methodology of Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine will argue that the staging of racial identity involves the invocation of joint narratives of sex and sexuality. Though the devising processes of Joint Stock – the company which first staged Cloud Nine – produced the core of the play by drawing upon the personal experiences of the cast, those specific, contemporary constructions of race and sexuality were re-ordered in Churchill's script as a form of continuity of existing cultural fantasies. Rather than describing a simple persistence of certain subject states, Cloud Nine's interrelation of Victorian

[183] Slavoj Žižek, Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture (Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 1997) 7.

and twentieth-century values makes apparent the interdependent discourses which produce the claim of stable categories of race, sex and sexuality. However, that critical reading might first be stalled by the difficulties of differentiating between racial and sexual alterities; that is, by a desire to avoid collapsing all difference from a presumptively white heterosexual and male subjectivity into the same kind of difference.

The Racial Closet: Whiteness as "Unmarkedness"

That kind of difficulty may stem from the perception that race and sex can occupy similar performative fields – in that conventions such as naturalism make a claim to coherent representations of sexual and racial subjects, and in claiming that "seeing is believing" conceal a dependency on underlying essentialist fantasies of continuity. Though the verisimilitude of theatrical realism can mistakenly read as proximity to an unmoderated Real, it is possible to read the use of historical or biographical material in performance as an attempt to destabilise a simplistic opposition of performative artifice and the material subject. As such, an analysis of the performance of race presents a further critical perspective on the construction of "legitimate" identities. That analysis – which recognises certain recurring performance practices – challenges whether race is shaped by the same forms of performativity that construct identities marked primarily by sex and gender.

The authentic presentation of a sexual or racial identity is frequently achieved through the reproduction of personal histories or other legitimating narratives, such as "coming out" or homophobic and racist subjectification: from incidents of name-calling through more serious hate-crimes. Identification (either through an external taunt or a self-nomination) hinges in such narratives on a performative moment of lexical nomination: a choice of terms (of abuse or self-nomination) that carry the locutionary force to denote a particular subject status. In the case of racial subjects, those nominative epithets make coherent a subject who may already be materially racially marked through the colour of their skin or other specific signifier. However, those speech acts also denote a specific subject status, which in turn conveys a

variety of social information about social acceptance, access to rights and privileges and the ability to nominate others in turn. Furthermore, whereas the naming epithets can take the form of an involuntary shaming or "outing" for queer subjects – the revelation of something that has been hidden – racial epithets more frequently operate on the presumption that the category of race is already transparent.

There is a presumptive potential for passing in the presentation of sexual identity; after even a heightened (say, camp) representation of a non-heterosexual identity, costumes and gestures can be set aside. Even in the context of long-term "out" queer subjects, there exists the possibility that this denotation of sexual subject status can be revoked, altered or concealed. As has been previously argued, a fluid sense of identity has been offered as a desirable quality of a queer identity – and potentially the hallmark of a queer theoretical ideology. Yet however desirable a functional politics of evasion might appear, the capacity of subjects to reinvent themselves is limited by the cultural discourse in which they operate. In particular, it is questionable whether this theoretical "retractability" of sexuality (a self-willed and readily reversible self-closeting) is available to racially marked subjects. Unlike non-heterosexual sexualities, which are rarely constructed through a narrative of hereditariness, race is frequently led by notions of "stock" or "bloodline" which are read as "natural," complete and coherent categories, carrying with them a sense of an absolute bodily presence which is neither (as non-heterosexual identity is sometimes framed) a matter of choice nor temporary allegiance. Yet in that discourse the biography of race is mistakenly presented as a neutral, passive register in the same way as in which non-heterosexual identities might be thought to be detached from a specific cultural history. Rather than identifying a historical construction of blackness or homosexuality, this process identifies all such marked subjects as atemporal alterns.

Further to that conflict, narratives of "passing" seem to operate in very similar terms for race and sexuality, insofar as unmarked status is available to those who are able to conceal the indicators (in speech, appearance, etc.) that denote particular subject status. Interestingly, the scenario of racial passing has long been informed –

particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century history of America – by a literal and symbolic "one drop" law. Such a system, which traces racial status through ancestry, produced the situation where legally black subjects were visibly – and thus socially – white. Kathleen Pfeiffer's Race Passing and Individualism touches on the problematic situation of those who "deny" or "desert" one racial group for another, arguing that the manipulation of racial identity is no different to that carried out by those who reinvent themselves in terms of religion or class.[184] Furthermore, the hardships placed upon those with mixed race parentage present an opportunity for comparison to those who have faced homophobic persecution and in doing so suggest the notion of racial closeting.[185]

However, Pfeiffer's discourse of reinvention tends to conceal the structural and symbolic systems which codify and constrain not only the possibility to manipulate identity but also the available subject categories into which an individual might seek reassignment. Janet Harbord argues that the corporeal body of the non-white subject "gets in the way, pronounces theatrically the distance between the identification and the identity." The possibility of passing is limited by the relationship of a perceived cultural neutrality of a white body in opposition to the marked, "other" non-white body:

> for the white man, "passing" is possible precisely because of the invisibility of the white body; the fantasy is achieved because the materiality of the corporeal body is not pronounced socio-culturally. Thus, fantasy dissimulates materiality for certain subject categories, whilst foregrounding it for others.[186]

To read white versus non-white in terms of such a binary system ignores the privileged position which whiteness occupies prior so such a system being articulated. In identifying that "blind" privileging, Ross Chambers argues that such binary systems are dependent on the cultural assumption of whiteness as an

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[184] Kathleen Pfeiffer, Race Passing and Individualism American (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

[185] A recent discussion of this issue in the UK can be found in Jill Olumide, Raiding the gene pool : the social construction of mixed race (London: Pluto Press, 2002). Valerie Smith offers a related discussion of the intersection of passing, race and gender in American fiction: "Reading the Intersection of Race and Sex in Narratives of Passing," Diacritics 24.2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1994).

[186] Janet Harbord, "Identifications Edge: dreams, bodies and the butcher's wife," Psycho-politics and Cultural Desires, eds. J. Campbell and J Harbord (London: UCL Press, 1998) 176-7.

unmarked category:

> Marked and unmarkedness [...] are relative categories; who is marked and who not is ultimately a matter of context. In linguistics, from which social semiotics borrowed the concept of markedness, there is no sense that the unmarked/marked pair lines up with concepts like normalcy and deviation or unexaminedness and unexaminability.[187]

Chambers asserts that race acts as the primary category of marked or unmarkedness; from a queer perspective it would appear that race could occupy a more significant position than sexuality, potentially because of the perceived contrast between race as an inborn, fixed aspect and sexuality as an acquired, chosen aspect (descending from a primary heterosexuality). In a dominantly white culture, particularly one with a history that includes colonisation, empire-building and slavery, it is not surprising that racial signification should occupy a position of primacy. Interestingly, Chambers argues that this system of signification actually excludes whiteness as an available category; instead whiteness is an unmarked category from which other marked categories are derived:

> There are plenty of unmarked categories (maleness, heterosexuality, and middle classness being obvious ones), but whiteness is perhaps the primary unmarked and so unexamined – let's say "blank" category. Like other unmarked categories, it has a touchstone quality of the normal, against which members of the marked categories are measured and, of course, found deviant, that is, wanting. It is thus (unlike linguistic unmarkedness) situated outside the paradigm that it defines. Whiteness is not itself compared with anything, but other things are compared unfavourably with it, and their own comparability with one another derives from the touchstone. In other words, unmarked or "blank" categories are *aparadigmatic*. Only the marked categories form part of the paradigm and may therefore be compared with one another. [188]

Chambers describes a form of binarism that conceals the terms of its oppositional structure, a system that makes a claim for the derivedness of non-white subjects whilst attempting to render invisible the privileging of white subject status such a positioning creates. The "aparadigmatic" quality of race relies upon a structural and

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[187] Ross Chambers, "The Unexamined," Whiteness: A Critical Reader, ed. Mike Hill (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997) 188.
[188] Chambers 189. Emphasis original.

symbolic opposition of subjects which are "white" and subjects which are "non-white." To entertain a notion of marked categories it is necessary to retain an awareness of the omnipresent unmarked (in this system, white) subject that makes the notion of "unmarkedness" viable.

Furthermore, while different non-white or non-heterosexual identities can be compared with one another, it is only because they are considered to be derivational forms of whiteness or heterosexuality. In occupying a position of presumptive primacy,

> one of the effects of such phenomena is to distribute to unmarkedness the privileges of normalcy and unexaminedness and to reserve for markedness the characteristics of derivedness, deviation, secondariness, and examinability, which function as indices of disempowerment (although, oddly, not always of undesirability).[189]

While it might be possible to form a slightly uneasy cultural distinction between "natural" race and "artificial" or "chosen" sexuality, those categories are only available through a system of presumptive blank categories that precede delineation. Concurrently, it can be observed that strategies like that supported by Chambers posit the continued viability of a binary (whiteness versus non-whiteness) even as a deconstructive analysis is pursued. How, then, do performance practices begin to decode and deconstruct this system of signification? I believe it is necessary to seek out performance practices that do not collapse all forms of difference into one register of alterity; to go further and necessarily challenge an unmarked "original," "whole" subject from which more individuated and specific notions of markedness are derived, and in doing so examine the values and images that shape those dominant subject categories.

Cloud Nine and Cross-Category Casting

The performance practices at work within Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine provide a useful case study not only of the problematic interplay of racial and sexual

[189] Chambers 189.

signification, but also of the forms that the racial and sexual fantasies implicit in such performances might take. In both dramatic convention and textual, political content, Cloud Nine is specifically intended to confront such fantastical constructions. The script requires cross-category performances, for men to play women, and women men; it also explicitly insists that a black character be played by a white actor. These performances, however, are not intended to be naturalistic deceptions: Churchill's script depends on an audience being able to see the discrepancy between the identity of the performer, and the character that he or she is portraying. Framed by that convention, the play opens with a clear definition of its central characters and the set of values which this strategy of juxtaposition is intended to question:

Clive — This is my family. Though far from home
We serve the Queen wherever we may roam.
I am a father to the natives here
And father to my family so dear.

He presents BETTY. She is played by a man.

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,
And everything she is she owes to me.

Betty — I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
Is to be what he looks for in a wife.
I am a man's creation as you see,
And what men want is what I want to be.

CLIVE presents JOSHUA. He is played by a white.

Clive — My boy's a jewel. Really has the knack.
You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black

Joshua — My skin is black by oh my soul is white.
I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
I only live for him. As you can see,
What white men want is what I want to be.

CLIVE presents EDWARD. He is played by a woman.

Clive — My son is young. I'm doing all I can
To teach him to grow up to be a man.[190]

[190] Caryl Churchill, Cloud Nine (1989; London: Nick Hearne Books, 2003) 1.1. Further citations are provided in-text.

Churchill's opening aligns racial, sexual and familial identities as extensions of the same system of values, bound together in the notion of the British Empire.

This primary series of contrasts is then aligned with a fresh set of internal contrasts to the second act. Though the first act is set in the Victorian era, and the second in 1979, only twenty-five years have passed for the characters within the dramatic action. The transition between Victorian and late-twentieth century periods allows several dramatic and thematic effects. The two periods indicate two cultural contexts which shape our understanding of the "re-sexing" of the characters' and performers' bodies. Of particular note is the opposition of the Victorian body – where sexual acts are concealed or restrained in act one – to a modern, liberated body. Within that system of contrast, there is also the suggestion of historical progression – that although there is a depiction of continuity between the two eras, the second period is presented as an improvement in terms of change in social and moral codes that govern identity. It is important therefore to recognise the terms in which that progressiveness is presented. In particular, the notion of liberation in Cloud Nine is shaped by a generation of sexual politics (primarily from the late 1960s and 70s) that reads the expression of sexuality as emancipatory and, slightly more problematically, that sexual acts themselves are inherently radical and emancipatory, which can transform and liberate a subject. The focus on sexual acts (including the convention of transformative gender-play) as liberational acts is perhaps one of the more problematic and overlooked aspects of Cloud Nine, particularly when that mode of performativity is viewed in terms of pre-AIDS culture that reads the material body in relatively unproblematised terms. Cloud Nine's dependency on specific conventions of identity-as-performance invokes several of the central problems that queer theory seeks to investigate, not least of which is whether such a performativity can be considered useful or effective in producing meaningful political change.

Beyond this cultural context, the transition from one period to another also allows for a more directly functional discontinuity of characters, allowing the original strategy of cross-casting to be doubled by allowing act one characters to be portrayed by different performers in act two. For example, in the original 1979 production at the

Dartington College of Arts and later, the Royal Court, Betty (the wife of Clive, the colonial administrator) was played by a man – Jim Hooper. In the second act, Hooper played the part of Edward (Clive and Betty's son), a part which in the first act had been played by a woman, Julie Covington. This combination – a connection between mother and son – might suggest that Clive's son's masculinity is constructed in much the same way as his wife's femininity: they are both extensions of Clive's own perceptions of how men and women should act, an idea expressed explicitly in the play's opening rhyming couplets. Additionally, Anthony Sher, playing the part of Clive (the colonial administrator and father of the family) took the role of Cathy, a five-year-old girl in act two:

> Cathy is played by a man, partly as simple reversal of Edward being played by a woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seemed appropriate to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as with Edward, to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl.[191]

This strategy of juxtaposition – both between characters and actors, and between the characters portrayed by the same actor in acts one and two – works particularly well to draw out various different expectations connected to sexuality. The relationship between Edward and Gerry (played in the original staging by Tony Rohr, who performed the part of the black "boy," Joshua, in act one) provokes a connection between sexual preference and gender roles:

Gerry	Stop it.
Edward	Stop what?
Gerry	Just be yourself.
Edward	I don't know what you mean. Everyone's always tried to stop me being feminine and now you are too.
Gerry	You're putting it on.
Edward	I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked. You do like me like this really.

(Cloud Nine, 1.2)

The audience is challenged to consider what constitutes being feminine and is

[191] Caryl Churchill, introduction, Cloud Nine.

presented with the image of femininity as a social role, or series of gendered behavioural expectations, rather than a biological essence. Churchill's strategy allows an audience to see pervasive, traditional values by applying them to a subject for whom they should not be "natural." There are several potential observations leading from this, not least of which relates to Gerry's rejection of Edward's apparent femininity: if such behaviour is unsuitable for a man, why is it suitable for a woman? Is it related to domesticity? To being sexually passive? Is this relationship intended to parody a heterosexual pairing of masculine and feminine halves, or to problematise male-male pairings? This alignment certainly allows an audience to begin to separate out some of the relationships of desire and identity – a person's perceived femininity does not have a simple relationship to his or her sexual identity (or his or her current or preferred choice of sexual partner).

However, there are several interesting problems when this performative convention is extended to the issue of racial identity, the first of which suggests we consider whether racial identity can be accessed and performed in the same sense (and using the same conventions) as sexual identity.

Performing Race and the Closet

The difficulty in mapping the strategy established in Cloud Nine for exploring issues of sexual politics onto issues of race may relate to the performance practices explored and developed in the workshop process prior to staging the play. The Joint Stock method of producing a new play during the period of Cloud Nine's development was to begin with a period of workshops – theatre games, improvisation, research, crash courses in professional skills, interviews and other activities – to produce material for the play. This was followed by a writing break during which there were no workshops or rehearsals. After this pause of several weeks, the writer would return to the group for a final rehearsal period, when he or she would continue to work with the cast and director on any alterations (major and minor) that might need to be made. In particular, the workshop period has been regarded as the most defining characteristic of Joint Stock's methodology – along

with the sometimes frustrating unpaid pause between workshop and rehearsal periods which precluded actors joining other productions. The development of Cloud Nine broadly followed that form, beginning with a basic premise that the play would be about "sexual politics." Miriam Margoyles – playing Maud and Victoria in the original production – recalls:

> it was the rehearsal process for me which means Joint Stock and I remember the truth sessions – sitting in a circle each day, one of us in the middle, telling everything about our lives, our sexuality and our insecurities – trusting a group of near strangers with buried secrets and private fears.[192]

This emphasis on personal narrative – as a trust-building tool and as a means of simultaneously researching and devising the play – is supported by Anthony Sher's memories:

> He [the director, Max Stafford-Clark] assured me that the meaning of sexual politics was precisely what we would all be seeking to define through the workshop and that, intriguingly, we would be using *ourselves* as research material.[193]

As director of the Royal Court production, Max Stafford-Clark had previously worked with Joint Stock – as a co-founder with William Gaskill and during his time as the director of the Traverse Workshop Company in Edinburgh. At the time of the transfer of Cloud Nine from the Dartington College of Arts to the Royal Court, where Stafford-Clark was also an associate director, the methodology behind Cloud Nine fitted well with his previous projects, professional experiences and his own desire for the direction of the English Stage Company – the resident company of the Royal Court.[194]

One of the games played during the workshop period focussed on a performative of the closet, to reproduce – and presumably teach the heterosexual members of the cast – the dynamics of forbidden desire. Sher, playing Clive and Cathy (the five-year-old

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[192] The Joint Stock Book – The Making of a Theatre Collective, ed. Rob Ritchie (London, New York: Methuen, 1987) 183.
[193] Ritchie 139. Emphasis original.
[194] See At the Royal Court, ed. Richard Findlater (Ambergate: Amberlane Press, 1981).

girl) recalls:

> A set of the court cards were returned to the pack and whoever drew these were gay (I'm afraid we did succumb to the temptation of using the Queen for this exercise) and had to seek out another and make contact in, say, a park or art gallery without arousing the attention of all the other (straight) people there. The danger of this situation would then be increased by the addition of one extra court card, say the Joker, into the shuffle and whoever drew this had to play a policeman on an assignment where he was masquerading as gay in order to catch people soliciting. Now the improvisation was played again with the "Queens" again trying to make contact, but hopefully with one another and not the Joker.[195]

This exercise is predicated on two tenets: that the desire being expressed is always pre-emptively forbidden, and, perhaps more significantly, that it is possible to conceal that desire. Disguising desire enacts an elision of the subject who desires – the subject for whom that desire has become the primary characteristic. It also presumes that passing can be performed or reproduced dramatically, outside of specific social contexts. Given that a successful enactment of passing would not register as an "act" at all – disappearing into the field of unmarkedness – such a performance would appear to focus instead on representing the *desire* to pass. As an expression of desire, any enactment would be directed to describe the pursuit of a particular subject position rather than the occupation of that position: the circuitous pursuit of unmarkedness rather than merely a performance of whiteness, or heterosexuality, in which "flaws" of mimesis are apparent.

Is it possible for a racially marked subject to pass as an unmarked sexual subject? Does the symbolic field of difference, stemming from contrast with white heterosexuality, enclose race and sex within the same boundary of suspect subject status? While this workshop process allowed a rehearsal or reconstruction of closeted (i.e. non-heteronormative) desire, the performative of passing that applies to race is not easily reproduced. Significantly, the theme of race in Cloud Nine is couched in Joshua's apparent desire to *be* white rather than to pass as white, which might compare with the desire *to be* heterosexual versus the desire *to pass as* heterosexual.

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[195] Ritchie 141.

It also appears that the issue of race was not dealt with in a particularly significant or direct way during the workshop process; the idea of setting the first act of the play in Victorian, colonial Africa was introduced to the group by Churchill in her first draft:

> When I came to write the play, I returned to an idea that had been touched on briefly in the workshop – the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which Genet calls "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised oppression." So the first act of Cloud Nine takes place in Victorian Africa, where Clive, the white man, imposes his ideals on his family and the natives. Betty, Clive's wife, is played by a man because she wants to be what men want her to be, and in the same way, Joshua, the black servant, is played by a white man because he wants to be what whites want him to be. Betty does not value herself as a woman, nor does Joshua value himself as a black. Edward, Clive's son, is played by a woman for a different reason – partly to do with the stage convention of having boys played by women (Peter Pan, radio plays, etc.) and partly with highlighting the way Clive tries to impose traditional male behaviour on him.[196]

Churchill's emphasis on "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression" suggests a very specific role for the theme of race within Cloud Nine: it acts as a means of establishing a coherent series of values, centred on the notion of Empire. Race becomes one of a series of fantasies of desire that shaped what the cast and playwright felt to be the received moral and cultural values that had been challenged within their own generation:

> The second act is set in London in 1979 [...]. I felt the first act would be stronger set in Victorian times, at the height of colonialism [...] and when the company talked about their childhoods and the attitudes to sex and marriage that they had been given when very young, everyone felt that they had received very conventional, almost Victorian expectations and that they had made great changes and discoveries in their lifetimes.[197]

Churchill's assertion that Joshua should be played by a white actor (because as a black man he wants to be a white man – because this is what he thinks whites want) is problematic. It may represent a purposefully twisted reading of the objective of a colonial discourse to

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[196] Caryl Churchill, introduction, Cloud Nine.
[197] Caryl Churchill, introduction, Cloud Nine.

> construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.[198]

A reading of this project of civilisation from the perspective of the colonised might be that the Empire would like everyone to be white, because whiteness implies education, religion and civilisation. However, this identification misreads the social dynamic between imperial master and indigenous slave. For Empire to persist as a material, political and cultural authority, it must retain a group of people and lands over which it can exercise domain. The British Empire does not want Joshua to become white – it might serve the stability and efficiency of the colonial project that Joshua acquire certain characteristics associated with cultural whiteness (such as education, religion, deference to class authority), but to make Joshua white would be to demolish the foundation of the colonising project.

Churchill's transformation of a black man into a white man challenges this narrative of justification by re-aligning (and thus drawing critical attention to) the signifiers of racial superiority. The redirection of signifiers is intended to disrupt the coherence of the pre-eminent system of signs; from that position it is then possible to move beyond a symbolic interplay to observe that white and black subject status is founded in a material politics of land, labour and power. Such a manoeuvre also permits a deconstruction of other elements of the colonial project: that one group of morally and ethnically superior subjects intend to "reform" and educate the other. That "reformation" is instead revealed as an ongoing process, a permanent relationship never intended to produce equality or liberty but instead serving to reproduce a relationship of power between two groups: the educated and the ignorant, the moral and the amoral, the Empire and its colonial subjects. It may be argued, though, that the enactment of such passing narratives reinstitutes their force, re-circulating and reproducing a particular cultural imperative even as the demand to pass or be transformed is interrogated. In particular, the presence of a white actor as a black character tends to conceal, once more, the issue of whether such a passing or wholesale transformation is possible.

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[198] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Oxford University Press, 1996) 41.

It is appropriate to reiterate Anthony Sher's recollection that the meaning and material of this play was intended to stem – through the workshop process – from the cast and crew, a group of exclusively white theatre practitioners. From this context, it can be argued that Churchill's work might deliberately set out to avoid presenting an "authentic" or "genuine" black character on stage: this was not a play about the material experience of black people in colonial Africa but rather a white fantasy of otherness in colonial Africa. In exploring various notions of sexual identity – which the group felt had been informed by Victorian values – the process guided Churchill to consider the nature of racial identity in the UK as an extension of historically situated fantasies of the British Empire. To be more specific again, Cloud Nine is concerned with white racial identity and the version of the ethnic and sexual other that such a sense of subjectivity produces. The convention of having a white actor play a black part acts to remove any suggestion of legitimacy that might stem from the presence of a material, black performer (in an inferred naturalistic performance) – and instead indicates a deliberately more stylised and counter-naturalistic performativity.

The representation of a black character by a white actor might even be interpreted as an inversion of the kind of gaze operating in blackface minstrelsy, wherein "'[b]lack' figures were there to be looked at, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators' positions as superior, controlling [...] figures."[199] While such a performance still might reiterate a pattern of cultural dominance of white actors in the presentation of non-white cultures, a denial of "blacking up" (when British performance traditions such as music hall might suggest it) removes the potential of a signifying practice in which the black character becomes a fetishistic and objectified spectacle. For Cloud Nine's strategy of misdirection and re-interpretation to work, a largely white audience must see itself on stage, not a parody of someone or something else. Such a strategy might then also add to the ability of "white men and women to focus on whiteness as also a colour, as it lessens the naturalizing of whiteness as a norm somehow different from

[199] Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," Representations 39 (Summer 1992): 28.

other colours. It interrupts the idea that only others are 'coloured' and therefore 'less' or 'different.'"[200] This notion is consistent with Anthony Sher's recollection that the material in Cloud Nine was intended to

> forc[e] an audience to challenge their own preconceptions as we had ourselves done during the workshop; [Churchill] wrote into the cast-list that the wife, Betty, should be played by a man, the black servant be played by a white, the son by a woman, and the daughter by a dummy which could be carelessly tossed around as the cute but negligible object the Victorians would regard a female offspring.[201]

The convention of white actor as black character is not a singular choice; that casting decision is supported by various other staging effects in the script: all other black characters (the servants, the boys from the village, members of other tribes) are either only present on stage through the accounts of white characters, or heard at a distance from off-stage. Even the terms in which Joshua introduces himself are faintly unreal, lyrical, revising William Blake's "Little Black Boy": "My skin is black but oh my soul is white." To emphasise that Cloud Nine's involvement with the imagery of race operates primarily in terms of a colonial history, the distant historical fantasy of act one becomes a contemporary colonial reality of Northern Ireland in act two: the deracinated Joshua is replaced by another disembodied representation, in the form of the spectre of Bill, the brother of Lin,[202] who was been killed in Belfast during military service.

It should also be acknowledged, though, that there may have been a degree of pragmatism in the decisions surrounding Cloud Nine's origins, not least concerning the number of black or other non-white people who were known to the relatively small group of regular directors, actors and writers surrounding Joint Stock and the Royal Court. Rita Wolf, commenting on the Joint Stock production of Hanif Kureishi's Borderline in 1981 (the first Joint Stock production to include non-white

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[200] E. Ann Kaplin, "The 'Look' Returned: Knowledge Production and Constructions of 'Whiteness' in Humanities Scholarship and Independent Film," Whiteness – A Critical Reader, ed. Mike Hill (New York, London: New York University Press, 1997) 325.
[201] Ritchie 141.
[202] Lin appears in the second act as Cathy's mother and in a narrative that develops a lesbian relationship with Victoria, Betty's daughter. Except for Cathy, all characters in the second act are performed by actors of their own sex.

performers) admits that "it took an inordinately long time for non-white actors to find their way into a Joint Stock show." Borderline – the nineteenth Joint Stock venture – is interesting because it too utilised a convention of cross-race casting:

> With a bold stroke, we cast two of our three actors in Asian roles. There was only one principal white character in the play. Still, we were Joint Stock. Everyone knew that with Joint Stock adults play children, men play women. So, for the first time, white would play black. The fact that none our three black actors would be seen as white characters was something the company would doubtless rectify next season.[203]

The presentation of Asian characters by white actors did not pass without protest. Issues of both legitimacy of performance and the denial of parts to an already underused group of actors were raised. Presented at the Royal Court with a mixed cast, "the play was criticised by some members of the Asian community because of the director's choice to cast white actors in some of the Asian roles."[204] While this criticism was supported by the uneven casting policies in the entertainment sector, it can be observed that Kureishi's plays have generally sought to contribute to a "shift [in] the perception of 'Asianess' for mainstream audiences by representing characters and stories outside the 'problematic' sociological box in which other writers had set them."[205]

Joint Stock's casting decisions in Cloud Nine and Borderline display the potential flaw in their political methodology. Through the presentation of particular characteristics (of race or gender) by subjects who were not usually thought to have those aspects, Joint Stock was able to separate out various preconceived expectations from the subjects to which they were routinely applied. In doing so, that strategy sometimes removed or erased from the stage the subjects which were mis- or under-represented in the prior situation, preventing them from taking a role in the presentation of their own potential subjectivities and reserving the right to representation for a small group of apparently privileged performers. Furthermore,

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[203] Ritchie 147.
[204] Alda Terraciano, "South Asian Diaspora Theatre in Britain," South Asian Diaspora Arts and Literature Archive,24 Mar. 2006 <http://www.salidaa.org.uk/salidaa/docrep/docs/sectionIntro/theatre/docm_print.html>.
[205] Alda Terraciano, "South Asian Diaspora Theatre in Britain."

the dependency by Joint Stock on the experiences and lives of the cast as source material for the majority of their projects inadvertently privileges – or at the very least gives primacy to - white experience and subjectivity, even if such material is used to challenge that position of privilege. Such a dependency on that material might present problematic boundaries for any political impact; Joint Stock's working methods place it on the fault-lines of the political issues of power and representation it seeks to investigate. In the case of Cloud Nine, that method problematically writes the issue of racial difference into a narrative of white sexual liberation.

There is then a persistent issue of racial erasure – the absence, in material terms, of black bodies on stage in Cloud Nine. However, I think that a return to this absent yet present body – the body of Joshua, presented by a white actor – reinforces the argument that the role of the racial other in Cloud Nine is not intended to be a realistic representation of blackness. That body instead functions as a performative expression of the role that racial otherness plays in the construction of dominant forms of desire – and in this context, specifically Imperial, white, heterosexual and male desire. The flaw with this reading of Joint Stock and Churchill's strategy is that it presumes the construction of the "other" or "non-white" subject is within the exclusive domain of the "original" white subject; the fantasy of the other is constructed without any participation from the subject the position of power presumes to represent. However, this presumptive omnipotence of representation allows us to follow more closely the discontinuities that arise in the representation of supposedly coherent non-white subjects and in doing so use those fault-lines to begin to chart the limits of colonial fantasy.

Colonial Subjects: Black Bodies, White Desire

The historical and geographical setting of Africa as an outpost of the British Empire prompts a clear relationship between black colonised and white coloniser in terms of status. In fact, the indigenous population no longer have any subject status beyond being colonial subjects; local culture is erased. In this symbolic field, anything that cannot be attributed to the Empire – a cultural imperative of whiteness,

heterosexuality and masculinity – becomes associated, directly or indirectly, with the colonised other. This field operates by collapsing race and nation into a singular discourse, combining both the historical destinies of nationalism and the "racist dreams of eternal contaminations transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations."[206]

To be black is to be invisible (to be hidden, "up the river," beyond the plantation or outside of the house, present only as the sound of drums) or to be visible but deracinated and in service: Joshua is nominally a servant but his race marks him as a slave. As a slave, Joshua's role denotes a particular kind of status position – even though Harry's homosexuality might be reviled by Clive, it does not carry with it the pariah demarcation of blackness, marked as external to dual fantasies of race and nation. Though Harry's sexuality is rejected by Clive, he remains white and able to be redeemed; in contrast, Joshua does not have access to the narrative of moral recovery available to Harry as a full member of the colonising culture. Joshua's surrogate status both justifies his weakness and bars him from salvation. Yet this symbolic field should not be read exclusively in terms of binary opposition of black to white but also through a rhetoric of proximity: to the colonial outpost at the edge of the jungle, or to England. Cloud Nine's colonial nightmare presents the situation in which, rather than transforming the indigenous culture, the coloniser has become weakened, almost diseased, by his surroundings:

Clive	You have been away from England too long.
Harry	Where can I go except into the jungle to hide?
Clive	You don't do it with the natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen.
Harry	Clive, I am like a man born crippled. Please help me.

(Cloud Nine, 1.4)

Though presented in comic terms, same-sex desire presents a threatening departure from the colonial narrative whereby the civilizing cultural influence of England diminishes with distance, centred on the notional head of state and civilisation in

[206] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983) 136.

whose name the project of colonisation is carried out. Homosexual desire is a betrayal of queen and country because it threatens both the continuation of patriarchal descent and the supposed moral superiority of the coloniser. Clive proposes that Harry's serial moments of weakness are to be cured through proximity to two women – by returning home to England and to the Queen's presence, and by marrying Mrs Saunders. This move would also resolve Mrs Saunders' unresolved social position as a widow, bringing her back within a structure of male authority and realigning her as an object of male desire.

Harry has been able to conceal his homosexuality by keeping it within the literal (and symbolic) jungle. There is an implicit suggestion that he has been having sex with local tribespeople on his long trips up the river, flagged not least by his ease in propositioning Joshua. The fantasy of "dark continent" Africa is performed through the bodies of its inhabitants – as Harry's homosexuality is concealed by the location of his partners so is it concealed by their status as marked subjects.

Harry only speaks out when he misreads Clive's semi-misogynistic rejection of women, a misogyny which couches homosociality as a fulcrum between duty and desire.

Clive	Women, Harry. I envy you going into the jungle, a man's life [...]. I know the friendship between us, Harry, is not something that could be spoilt by the weaker sex. Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship [...]. There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important. And there is the pleasure. But what we put ourselves through to get the pleasure, Harry. [...]. There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly.
Harry	I didn't know you felt like that.
Clive	Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us.
Harry	Clive –
Clive	Think of the comradeship of men, Harry, sharing adventures, sharing danger, risking their lives together.

Harry takes hold of Clive

Clive What are you doing?
Harry Well, you said –
Clive I said what?
Harry Between men.

Clive is speechless

I'm sorry, I misunderstood, I would never have dreamt, I thought –
Clive My God, Harry, how disgusting.
Harry You will not betray my confidence.
Clive I feel contaminated.

(Cloud Nine, 1.4)

Clive is repulsed because his generic fantasy of homosocial companionship has crossed over into specific sexualised desire. This homoerotic narrative, where the exploration of the jungle acts as an expression of hidden male desire is not unique, as Robert Aldrich observes in his substantial history, Colonialism and Homosexuality:

> The British weekly of boys' stories, Chums, 'was full of idealized homoerotic illustrations of males rescuing each other in situations of mortal peril.' Physical closeness and intense emotional bonding would make suitably imperial men of British boys, while it reinforced a heroic, virile companionship not too distant from sexual intimacy.[207]

This eroticisation of heroism is apparent in Edward's fantasy of adventuring up-river with Harry:

Edward I don't mind being awake because I make up adventures. Once we were going down to the rapids. We've lost the paddles because we used them to fight off the crocodiles. A crocodile comes at me and I stab it again and again and the blood is everywhere and it tips up the raft and it has you by the leg and it's biting your leg right off and I take my knife and stab it in the throat and rip open its stomach and it lets go of you and bites my hand but it's dead. And I drag you onto the river bank and I'm almost fainting with pain and we lie there in each other's arms.

(Cloud Nine, 1.2)

[207] Robert Aldrich, Colonialism and Homosexuality (London, New York: Routledge, 2003) 107.

The imagery of penetration and amputation – a kind of phallic anxiety – is entirely appropriate, matching the invocation of disease and infirmity in Clive's condemnation and reciprocated by Harry's response ("I feel contaminated," "like a man born crippled").[208] Homosexual desire is expressed as a threat to the wholeness of the body – a threat to the subject that travels upwards through a line of signification as a threat to the Empire. That connection – between the privileged male body and the figurative body of the Empire – describes how the structure of the Empire acts as closet that interconnects misogynist, homosocial and homosexual discourses. Homosexuality becomes a function of homosociality and the privileging of the male subject infers the privileging of male desire, desire which can only be truly reciprocated by another legitimate, and hence male, subject.

Given these combined rhetorics of homophobia and racial superiority, Joshua's sexual identity is remarkably free from condemnation. Joshua's sexual availability is perhaps tied to his social malleability – he is Clive's boy, a servant of the family, but is also able to disobey and insult Betty, with Clive's coy approval. He is associated with the family in the house, apparently acting as their proxy to discipline other disobedient slaves at the end of act one. However, Joshua also plays their interests against each other – reporting to Clive when he sees Betty and Mrs Saunders kissing, telling Edward a non-Judaeo-Christian (and potentially matriarchal) creation story – "First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess" – which he then denies and rewrites to support Clive's misogyny:

> Joshua Of course it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble.
>
> (Cloud Nine, 1.4)

Joshua – as the cultural other who has become distanced from his racial allegiances –

[208] Allyson Lunny provides a contemporary parallel to this anxiety and homophobia in her discussion of "homosexual threat": a defence argued in certain assault cases, where a "predatory, sexually aggressive and hyper-masculinized" homosexual subject "pose[s] an imaginable threat to normative masculinity." See "Provocation and 'Homosexual' Advance: Masculinized Subject as Threat, Masculinized Subjects under Threat" Social & Legal Studies 12.3 (2003).

occupies an unusually flexible position. In fact, Joshua's autonomy in making himself available for Harry (noting how Harry doesn't give an order but instead invites Joshua to join him for sex) underlines how Joshua's presence is essential to the continued stability of the household. He is servant, child-minder and sex-object, supporting and justifying explicit and implicit desires:

Harry	Where's Clive?
Joshua	Going around the boundaries, sir.
Harry	Have you checked there's nobody in the barns?
Joshua	Yes sir.
Harry	Shall we go in a barn and fuck? That's not an order.
Joshua	That's alright, yes.

(Cloud Nine, 1.1)

Joshua's uncomplicated agreement is presented in contrast to Harry's troubled relationship with Betty, inappropriate not least of all because she is married to Clive. Betty is shaken by the undetermined and thus threatening quality of Harry's desire:

Betty	When I'm near you it's like going out into the jungle. It's like going up the river on a raft. It's like going out in the dark.
Harry	And you are safety and light and peace and home.

(Cloud Nine, 1.1)

Note here the shared sexual lexicon between Betty, Clive and Harry: a series of images that construct desire as dangerous, unknown (like being on a river, like being in the jungle). Appropriately, this construction of desire shares the same terms as racial otherness (being out of sight, at a distance). The forbidden object of sexual desire comes to occupy the same symbolic space as the racially othered subject.

The sexual and racial alterns in Cloud Nine appear to occupy similar positions in the field of colonial signification, threatening but essential parts of the Imperial project, continually present at the edge of what is defined as civilized. Aldrich observes that the colonial project was dependent on the kind of situations where homosociality was the norm:

> The gender imbalance [of the colonies] pushed some into "situational" homosexual relations. Others intentionally looked for male bedmates and soul mates amongst either compatriots or natives. An unknown number escaped condemnation of homosexuality in Europe to take advantage of laxer moral strictures in the wider world [...]. Homosociality, sometimes veering to homosexuality, was inescapable in the early colonial world.[209]

Homosexuality – or homosociality which includes same-sex sexual acts – then occupies a privileged position. Occurring in colonial settings – and thus notionally at the edge of what is considered civilized, homosexuality – like contact with the culture of the uncivilized – is tolerated but not accepted. However, that participation with the (sexual and racial) forbidden is necessary, not only on a symbolic level which allows the construction of notions of whiteness and Empire, but on a functional material, political level.

Restaging Whiteness

While the absence of black actors in Cloud Nine continues to be a point of contention, it is challenging to imagine more effective performative strategies, or at least strategies which would not produce similarly intractable problems. However, there is certainly potential in imagining alternative, experimental stagings. There are several obvious recombinations available that might succeed within the framework established by the other cross-casting decisions within Cloud Nine. The first of these might be to retain the original choice of having Joshua played by a white actor but to have that actor "black-up," in the sense of a minstrel performance in which it is obvious that a white performer has applied stylised make-up. This decision could do several things: it confirms the absence of an "authentic" black character and, in its place, emphasises the role of a white or Empire-oriented cultural fantasy of blackness. Further, as blackface minstrelsy has become commonly (though not universally) reviled in contemporary, multicultural Britain, such a choice would form a connection between that kind of performance and the values that performance assumed were shared by its audience. Not only would the actor's appearance make explicit the implicit racisms involved in those representations – particularly for those

[209] Aldrich 57.

in the audience who might not have associated spectacles like the Black and White Minstrel Show with displays of white cultural dominance – but it would place the narrative within a very specific context of historical values.

The making clear of the play's connection to the racial conflicts of the Victorian era and the late 1970s might be especially important for a contemporary (that is, a production staged now) audience's understanding of how those issues have been transformed (in many cases not yet resolved) in their own generation. If, in its most effective elements, Churchill and Joint Stock's methodology operates (as Elin Diamond defines Brecht's theoretical project) by "demystifying representation, showing *how and when* the object of pleasure is made, releasing the subject from imaginary and illusory identifications,"[210] such associations would call direct attention to the symbolic and cultural field which the play seeks to interrogate. Furthermore –continuing momentarily within this Brechtian framework – such a staging effect would refine our notion of the material, political context of Cloud Nine, taking up

> the task of epic theatre [...] not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions. But "represent" does not here signify "reproduce" in the sense used by the theoreticians of Naturalism. Rather, the first point at issue is to *uncover* those conditions [...]. This uncovering (making strange, or alienating) of conditions is brought about by processes being interrupted.[211]

A second strategy, which perhaps inverts the first, might be to abandon Churchill's casting choice and introduce a black actor to play the part of Joshua. However, to retain the sense of constructed racial identity within the text, the actor would then "white-up." That choice would immediately signal an inversion of black-face practices, suggesting a challenge to the primacy of white performers in the presentation of race. It would remove the unmarked or blank status of whiteness by signalling that any race – when reduced to simple signifying practices like skin colour – can be simulated by any performer, while challenging performance practices and cultural beliefs that suggest otherwise – significantly, that skin colour is a

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[210] Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory – Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," TDR 32.1 (Spring 1988): 83. Emphasis added.
[211] Walter Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1977) 18.

coherent signifier of race. Furthermore, Joshua's desire to "be white" would become immediately problematised, by drawing attention to a dubious system of signifiers which are presumed to confer authentic, immutable "whiteness." This "reverse minstrelsy" might demonstrate a rather direct version of what Elin Diamond identifies in Brecht's methodology as the alienation rather than impersonation of a character by a performer, insofar as "she 'quotes' or demonstrates the character's behaviour instead of identifying with it."[212]

Central to this effect is a challenge to the "mimetic property of acting that semioticians call iconicity, the fact that the performer's body conventionally resembles the object (or character) to which it refers," a challenge reinforced by the cross-matching of performer's skin colour against that of the performed character. Emphasised in such a manner, the spectator is able to see a sign system *as* a sign system. Similarly, Diamond's reading of gender identities can be appropriated to describe a similar relation of racial identities, such as the situation whereby "gender coercively translates the nuanced differences within sexuality into a structure of opposition; males vs. female, masculine vs. feminine."[213] In racial terms, different ethnic markers are directed into oppositional groups of subjects: one original and presumptively white, and the other a distorted reflection of the first. Such a claim on originality implies mastery of representation and reproduction which, in making that claim, attempts to overwrite or erase the presence of the second subject group. The convention of black performer playing white character might act to counter this by reintroducing the material presence of a non-white performer within existing conventions in such a way as to challenge their efficacy and reveal the cultural presumptions that precede them.

The positioning of a black performer "playing white" within the opening tableau of the family unit in Cloud Nine could confirm the deliberate staging of whiteness and establish more clearly the gestic quality of the role of Joshua, a performance intended to direct the audience away from the portrayal of the Real towards a realisation that our differences "*from* the past and *within* the present are palpable, graspable and

[212] Diamond, "Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory – Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism" 86.
[213] Diamond, "Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory – Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism" 86.

applicable."[214] The alternative stagings presented here presume an existing gestic strategy – perhaps stemming from the opening tableau of the family unit – which pursues the relations of production which determine our social relations where we believe them to be at their most "natural":[215]

> *gestus* clearly involves a whole process, in which a specific act – indeed, a particular event, stituated in time and space, and affiliated with specific concrete individuals – is then somehow identified and renamed, associated with a larger and more abstract *type* of action in general, and transformed into something *exemplary* [...]. The theoretical viewpoint required by *gestus* is therefore one in which several "levels" are distinguished and then re-associated with each other.[216]

By repeatedly overstating the visual field (primarily skin colour) as a signifier in arbitrary relation to a signified subject status, practices of "cross-race" performativity might acquire a critical, political content. Furthermore, the emphasis on "make-up" – that is to say a cosmetic and potentially uniform effect – might also assist to counter the prevailing black/white dichotomy implicitly retained here, in that even when we deconstruct these racial identity categories we might be indicating that there remain truly "black" or "white" subject positions that can be achieved. The play of "white face" on "black body" contradicts the notion of "white original playing non-white derivative," invoking and inverting the purposefully unreal and anti-naturalist practices of black/face minstrelsy, where the effect of racial transformation is bordered (at the edges of the face, beyond the palm of the hand) by the "original" identity.

Rather than stripping away all notions of racial difference, this strategy interrogates the grounds on which such difference is constructed; the challenge here is not to the idea that cultural differences exist but that the manner in which difference is constructed and reproduced can and must be explained in terms of the relations of desire and power between different groups. The relations of race and desire in Cloud Nine are presented as culturally and historically situated phenomena:

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[214] Diamond, "Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory – Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism" 87.
[215] Elizabeth Wright, Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation (London, New York: Routledge, 1989) 20.
[216] Fredic Jameson, Brecht and Method (London, New York: Verso, 1998) 103. Emphasis original.

> what the spectator sees is not a mere mining of social relationships but a *reading* of it, an interpretation by an historical subject who supplements (rather than disappears into) the production of meaning.[217]

If Joint Stock and Cloud Nine's methods of engagement with dominant modes of representation are to be read as queer strategy, it may be necessary to assume a further functional stage to this interpretation. This reading asks whether the form that interpretation takes is consciously constructed, is an intentional rewriting of codes that is intended in some way to transform and adapt what is apparently rigid or original. Joint Stock's reliance on their personal experiences can then be entertained not as an irreconcilable flaw or weakness but rather as a functional working method that forcibly reacquaints us with the notion that "art can only make its representations from within ideology (from within a subject's unconscious determinations) not from some pure spot outside."[218] Instead of describing a foreclosure of alternative modes of representation, such an awareness drives the necessity for a continuous effort of deconstruction and reconstruction that performs itself – that is to say, performs and makes apparent the terms of its engagement with desire and representation.

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[217] Diamond, "Brechtian Theory / Feminist Theory – Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism" 130.
[218] Wright 20.

An assumption implicit in much of queer theoretical discourse is the capacity of queer theory to describe the construction and circulation of all (marginal) identities – to circumvent the systems of foreclosure that have been suggested in earlier discussion of naturalistic representations of sexuality and race. This assumption arises through queer theory's address of a perceived failure in prior forms of identity theory, in the "'*dis*-articulation' of terms involved in the system called family. This awareness, born of 'the number and *difference* of the dimensions that 'sexual identity' is supposed to organize into seamless and univocal whole"[219] yet does not, seeks to then address the points at which traditional discourses of identity fall short.

> That's one of the things that "queer" can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically.

As prior chapters have suggested, this resistance of the monolithic subject has expanded to touch dimensions that cannot be simply subsumed under gender and sexuality; recognising "all the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity fracturing discourses [...]."[220]

This systematic approach might also be seen in Eve Sedgwick's "axiomatic" introduction to The Epistemology of the Closet. While potentially a structure intended to parody rigid categorisation of identity, Sedgwick's axioms nevertheless present a "queer formatting" for all identities. This construction of an axiomatic system – literally a system from which there can be no exception – rests on a rejection of generic categories of heterosexual or homosexual, male or female identity and instead chooses axioms expressed in the broadest terms: "Axiom 1: People are different from each other." Sedgwick pursues this truism as the basis for arguing how few "respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with this self-

[219] Sedgwick, Tendencies 6.
[220] Sedgwick, Tendencies 8. Emphasis original.

evident fact"[221]; the first queer axiom is also an argument for the necessity of the queer theoretical project.

It is appropriate to consider, then, how certain forms of theatrical and political strategy either seek to demonstrate critically such a potential, or present problems for that assumption. In part, this concern is triggered by a prevailing awareness that in reading or deconstructing a dominant discourse (such as the phallus), such an approach may still delimit the possibilities for the kinds of desire and identity that can be described even when those alternatives appear to be radical. Queer theory's claim to escape this impasse – where one set of limitations is only ever replaced with another – should be treated with caution. A part of this concern is that a critical involvement with discourses of power and of the phallus may inadvertently privilege certain traditionally male and potentially patriarchal modalities of power, through an invocation of a presumptive maleness as the universal subject, even if that positioning is undertaken in an act of deconstruction. The status of the legitimate subjectivity – which is vocal, visible, sexed – is traditionally male and heterosexual; in asserting an alternative legitimacy that does not meet those criteria there is still the risk of reciprocal invocation – my new queer identity is legitimate because it conforms to the kind of power relationships inherent in male, heterosexual identities.

Suzanna Walters argues that "queer discourse sets up a universal (male) subject, or at least a universal gay male subject, as its implicit referent,"[222] and questions whether Sedgwick's identification with gay male or homosexual desire describes a more pervasive or symptomatic bias. Walters suggests that Sedgwick goes beyond a strategic identification with a political ally, becoming the postmodern subject who must "be" that ally. The effect of this focus is to force the sexuality of women – in particular lesbian identities – further into the margins, confirming that lesbianism is "not really the stuff of identities and identifications, merely the detritus of the grand narratives of male homosociality and homosexuality."[223] A similar line of criticism

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[221] Sedgwick, Tendencies 8.
[222] Suzanna Danuta Walters, "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More like a Fag?)" Signs 21.4 (Summer 1996): 846.
[223] Walters 847.

has been raised against an apparent emphasis on gay male drag as the paradigm of performativity in Judith Butler's Gender Trouble. Butler's response to this critique, notably in Bodies That Matter, has been to argue that drag:

> exposes or allegorizes the mundane psychic and performative practices by which heterosexualized genders form themselves through renunciation of the *possibility* of homosexuality, a foreclosure that produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to live. [...] What drag exposes, however, is the "normal" constitution of gender presentation in which the gender is performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachments or identifications that constitute a different domain of the "unperformable."[224]

Yet the male subject appears to persist (whether in drag or "unmarked") as a component of queer theory's attempt to undo that subject's precedence – as a privileged subject whose prior composition allows participation in the process of identification and renunciation, which in turn yields a specific historical category of "unperformable" subjects.

Sedgwick's choice of a gay male subject may, therefore, be indicative of her broader critical strategy to deconstruct the origins of such desire, particularly when that mode of desire describes a system of resistance to heterosexual male desire. It is also possible to read Sedgwick's identification with a gay male identity as a form of cross-identification, purposefully pursuing that which might systematically differentiate a straight woman from a gay man. It is also unclear how troublesome Sedgwick's identification with a gay male subject would be if she did not occupy such a significant position within the caucus of gay theoretical practitioners and, consequently, her choice of identification was not assumed to be indicative of a broader theoretical commitment. Though remaining problematic, Sedgwick's critical engagement with gay male desire prompts – if not demands – a necessary interest in gay female desire, to consider if and how a difference between "male" desire and "female" desire could be articulated without falling back into the categories which queer theory seeks to deconstruct. Such tensions direct critical interest back towards the central impasse queer thinking seeks to address. Rather, the question becomes

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[224] Butler, Bodies That Matter 235-6.

that if (gay) male desire and (gay) female desire are different, how and why are they different? What relationships to systems of power and representation do those forms of desire describe, construct and contest?

It is therefore necessary to articulate how such a critical positioning might inform a queer critical response: an analysis that will question what, if any, inflections appear in performative strategies that have been assumed to be universally viable. Of particular concern – initially through their production of an object subject discourse – are strategies dependent upon visibility and "coming out." Here, the dramatic works of Jill Posener (Any Woman Can), Jackie Kay (Twice Over) and Michelene Wandor (Care and Control) will suggest specific responses to that realisation. Building on the critical positions offered by a discussion of AIDS theatre and the construction of racially-marked fantasies, Posener and Kay's work suggests methodologies for addressing the persistent foreclosure of the representation of female-oriented desire. Crucially, this work suggests the necessity of resisting a homogenisation of queer subjectivities and, correspondingly, the performative strategies that might be used to realise those identities on stage or in a broader political discourse.

The Invisible Woman

Emily Sisley observes that there are multiple operational definitions for what we might recognise as "lesbian theatre": theatre about lesbian, rather than woman-woman, relationships; plays written by lesbians; theatre "about" lesbians; theatre performed by lesbians. In particular, Sisley fixes on a definition from William Hoffman's introduction to Gay Plays: The First Collection, rewritten to read: "I define [lesbian] theatre as a production that implicitly or explicitly acknowledges that there are [lesbians] on both sides of the footlights."[225]

This definition offers several useful observations. While there may be a semi-naturalistic claim to authenticity through lesbian performers playing lesbian parts, there is also space for a queer acknowledgement that lesbian performers might

[225] Emily L. Sisley, "Notes on Lesbian Theatre," TDR 25.1 (March 1981): 48.

intentionally choose to play non-lesbian parts – for reasons that might exceed closetedness. Also implicit in this particular image is the suggestion of the role of a female gaze in the construction of lesbian identity, a gaze which may be oblique in its return. Those in the audience cannot firmly identify the relationship between the part played and the subjectivity occupied; the performer, blinded by spotlights, can only make out the silhouetted outline of the audience. However, I do not want to pursue that metaphor too literally as it might fixate upon lesbian identity as a continually evasive, ephemeral category – which is a recurring problem in the pursuit of politically viable queer identities. The usefulness of such a strategic characterisation, as a means of resisting homophobic or misogynist definition, is undercut by its unavailability for those who wish to confirm material, political identities and circumstances. The functionality of such a definition lies in its potential resistance of a passive/active relationship of subject and object, audience member and performer (and potentially a female/male binary). It also offers, as this discussion will go on to suggest, a perspective on Laura Mulvey's discourse of the gaze that produces the possibility of a subject object relationship that does not describe a male-dominated structure of desire.

The identification of a specifically lesbian theatre also marks the recurrence of the politic of visibility. If such theatre seeks to pursue the urge to render opaque that which has been "invisible" as a political necessity of representation, the terms by which that visibility is engendered must be carefully considered. Among several potential concerns is that the presentation of lesbian subjects might not operate to galvanise communities and reciprocal acts of "coming out" in the same manner that a predominantly gay male theatre has identified (such as in the previously discussed Gay Sweatshop production, Mister X). Part of this concern is that the telos of "coming out" may privilege certain forms of non-heterosexual identity, not necessarily male homosexuality but certainly forms of identity which precede from dichotomies of public/private, open/secret - which might also relate to concurrent binaries of active/passive, male/female and, in turn, "male sexualities" versus "female sexualities." Shane Phelan speculates that the identification of lesbian identity through "coming out" may involve the privileging of a particular narrative,

"that the process of declaring one's lesbianism is a revelation, an acknowledgement of previously hidden truth. By implication, 'coming out' is a process of discovery or admission rather than one of construction or choice."[226] This stage of the discussion, then, will also consider under what circumstances it is possible to present the staging of lesbian lives and identities without reflexively re-introducing and maintaining the systems which, pre-emptively, render those identities invisible or restrict the terms of any possible visibility.

The terms of the rhetorical invisibility of the lesbian subject is such that she may be twice removed from the terms of public discourse, in the first instance as a woman when the universal subject is presumptively male and in the second on account of her non-heterosexuality. That doubling describes a space of unmarkedness, where an existing discourse of alterity or otherness – as in the case of racial markers – masks a further unaccounted for or unaccountable quality. A theatrical response to such invisibility might also need to counter the reintegration of prohibitions of certain subjectivities into the terms of existence of a potentially counter-hegemonic subject. Such a relationship – between the terms of prohibition and the countering subject – might be explained through the notion that

> identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome, and that its aim is accomplished only by reintroducing the difference it claims to have vanquished. The one with whom I identify is not me, and that "not being me" is the condition of the identification. Otherwise [...] identification collapses into identity, which spells the death of identification itself.[227]

The strategy of identification, then, rests on a continually reproduced sense of difference, in the sense that in order to identify oneself as being "different," a sense of "difference from" must be matched with a sense of "similarity to." There is here a partial paradox, that one recognises one's distinctive difference through recognition of sameness. The political argument for the recognition of a legitimate difference of gay, lesbian, bisexual or otherwise queer identities from "normative," heterosexual identities produces a cultural visibility that allows other individuals to recognise their

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[226] Shane Phelan, "(Be)Coming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics," Signs 18.4 (Summer 1993): 773.
[227] Butler, Precarious Life 145-6.

sense of difference as being similar to that queer sense of difference. This methodology of identification has become a central strategy of much of the performative and political action of queer and queer friendly organisations, acting as a primary measure upon which further action be designed. One needs a queer identity, it is presumed, before one can campaign for queer rights. As Lisa Walker observes, in her paper "How to Recognize a Lesbian"

> Privileging visibility has become the tactic of late-twentieth century identity politics, in which participants often symbolize their demands for social justice by celebrating visible signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination.[228]

Such celebrations of difference can be seen at work in the carnival- and festival-oriented costumes and floats of Pride marches. The emphasis on visibility can also be seen in the methodologies of direct action groups such as Queer Nation and ACT Up, organising highly visible, media-oriented actions, such as same-sex kiss-ins at shopping malls, and die-ins outside the offices of state officials to protest failing AIDS strategies. The Queer Nation slogan "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" depends on the identification of a public subject who can be seen in the public domain; the claim on public visibility is the root of that subject's legitimacy.

In a performative critique, certain important issues are raised by this strategy of staging manifest difference: that there is an assumption of continuing social visibility and hence viability or legitimacy beyond the site of that celebration or performance, or that, once initialised, the celebration is somehow continuous with being or otherwise acquires a persistent social agency. A central question is then whether the subject made legitimate by the demand for social justice – whose unmarkedness has been challenged by that demand – can persist beyond the pinch of that demand (potentially in the presence of continuing, unreformed injustice). Does the queer subject exist outside the moment of protest?

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[228] Lisa Walker, "How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are," Signs 18.4 (Summer 1993): 868.

Significantly, Walker also argues that such a pursuit of visibility might not act as a universally applicable strategy:

> While privileging visibility can be politically and rhetorically effective, it is not without problems. Within the constructs of a given identity that invests certain signifiers with political value, figures that do not present those signifiers are often neglected. Because subjects who can "pass" exceed the categories of visibility that establish identity, they tend to be regarded as peripheral to the understanding of marginalization.[229]

The apparent "ease" (which might imply a lack of conscious or active agency) with which such subjects might pass presents a problem for a performative critique of identity. Walker identifies this situation as a potential flaw in Judith Butler's account of "femme" lesbian subjects. Walker argues that Butler's presumption that performance constructs "the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construct" favours "butch" identities:

> The femme might be considered the *and* that cannot be contained in Butler's *either/or* paradigm; she both constructs the illusion of an interior gendered self (she looks like a straight woman) and parodies it (what you see is not what you get). Bringing the femme to the foreground elucidates the limitations of the expressive model of gender/sexual identity.[230]

The absence of a parodic or reflexive separation between interior and exterior gendered selves, as Walker argues, places certain lesbian subjects in a queer blind spot. It becomes necessary then to attempt to recognise a closeness of certain gendered characteristics to certain gender identities that persist despite deconstructive efforts, and persist in such a way as to, for example, describe feminine or femme identities as retrogressive. I want, then, to suggest some readings of Jill Posener's Any Woman Can and Jackie Kay's Twice Over which recognise this problem – of a tension between interior and exterior gendered selves – before examining the drive in Michelene Wandor's Care and Control to situate that tension in specific political circumstances. This choice of plays is intended, then, to demonstrate certain recurrent problems in the representation of lesbian characters on

[229] Walker 868.
[230] Walker 883. Emphasis original.

stage, and to argue how queer theory's reading of performance practice might seek to negotiate the critical impasses in representation that have been suggested.

Any Woman Can

Jill Posener's 1975 play, Any Woman Can, appears to argue a case for the political necessity of "coming out" and the concurrent public identification of legitimate lesbian identities. However, in doing so, the play also presents the process of "coming out" in such a manner as to complicate the notion of the straightforward revelation of a "true identity." The central character, Ginny, comes out not as a singular, identifiable subject, but through multiple identifications that serve to assert a commonality and frequency of lesbian identities. In the followingg act of self-nomination, Ginny denies the capacity of the audience's gaze to recognise her definitively:

> Ginny — You are looking at a screaming
> lesbian.
> A raving dyke,
> A pervert, deviant
> Queer, fairy, fruitcake, freak
> Daughter, sister, niece, mother, cousin,
> Mother-in-law,
> Chippie, actress, bishop's wife, MP,
> Machinist, typist, teacher, char
> I'm everywhere.[231]

Ginny is everywhere and – in refusing to stake a singular claim on a definitive subjectivity, such as might be confirmed singularly through familial roles, occupation or vituperative slur – is nowhere. By expressing a field of multiple, sometimes potentially contradictory signifiers, a tension emerges: between wanting to argue for an "ordinariness" for lesbian identity that refutes its characterisation as foreign, perverse and outside of normalised discourse by asserting its presence in the centre of that discourse, and asserting a form for lesbian identity that cannot be contained within the terms of those roles or representations. This dual emphasis

[231] Jill Posener, "Any Woman Can," Lesbian Plays I, ed. Jill Davis (London: Methuen, 1987). 15. Further citations are provided in-text.

could be characterised in terms of separatist and integrationist political agendas – "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" versus "when it comes down to it, we're all the same underneath."

Mary Bernstein, in her paper "Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement," observes that "the lesbian and gay movement seems largely to have abandoned its emphasis on *difference from* the straight majority in favour of a moderate politics that highlights *similarities to* the straight majority."[232] Any Woman Can can be read to resist such a categorisation, through an assertion of multiplicity which produces a sense of a subject that is both inside and outside of a dominant social order. In its proliferate descriptions of possible alternative forms which overlap, defer to, confer with and occasionally exist separately from each other, Ginny's list of potential lesbian identities suggest that such identities are not hidden but staged in plain sight. The phallic dynamic described by Laura Mulvey in her now much deconstructed paper "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," whereby "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" and "[t]he determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly,"[233] is stalled: a singular desirable object cannot be "discovered." In the place of a singular or essential fantasy are purposefully contradictory, multiple figures with the potential for all of those images to be real, or all to be illusory.

Through that dynamic of the gaze I would, however, momentarily observe that there is perhaps a problem in the relationship between a gay character on stage and an audience member. Beyond the intended strategy of reciprocal visibility – that might encourage those in the audience to come out and share that viable public visibility – is the possibility that such a display allows a closeted person to participate in a fantasy of exhibitionary outness. I watch someone "coming out" and can participate in the fantasy of "coming out" myself without actually doing so. By positioning them

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[232] Mary Bernstein, "Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement," The American Journal of Sociology 103.3 (November 1997): 532. Emphasis original.

[233] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Literary Theory: An Anthology, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden MA, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 589.

in the role of passive spectatorm, the display of "coming out" may inadvertently closet those in the audience – being as they are unable to profess their sexuality in a similar manner. Yet the value of such a dynamic may persist in the possibility that an individual in the audience is able to self-identify, shifting the emphasis from a call to make public a previously hidden identity to the self-realisation of that identity: a shift in personal, rather than public, awareness. However, the primary shift of emphasis I am trying to suggest here is from a subject who is "hiding" within an oppressive or disapproving cultural and symbolic frame, to a subject whose presence cannot be registered by that discourse. In the place of a single identifying moment, Ginny's multiple identifiers do not necessarily cause lesbian identity to emerge, but instead emphasise how that identity might be submerged in existing terms and conditions.

The dynamic of "coming out," whether staged as theatre or in a private life, is such as that the moment in which a potential subjectivity appears also describes the relationship of that nascent identity to an existing symbolic field or cultural frame of reference. In this way, lesbian identity – simultaneously marking "[a] raving dyke, A pervert, deviant, Queer, fairy, fruitcake, freak," and "Daughter, sister, niece, mother, cousin, Mother-in-law" – operates in Any Woman Can to describe a continually marginal position, neither definitively separated from or exclusively defined by relationships to a heteronormative system. This reading expands upon the impermanence of "coming out," insofar as entry into each new room or social setting requires a fresh statement of deviation from a presumptive norm for the value of an "out" subject's social visibility to be maintained.

Though strongly marked by a "coming out" narrative, Posener's Any Woman Can weighs the desire to come out against the desire for privacy, and "an ordinary life" against the concurrent fear of a loss of those prospects in a similar manner to Mr X, the Gay Sweatshop production with which the play toured. Any Woman Can had been developed separately at the Leicester Haymarket during the Women's Season of autumn 1974; the association with Gay Sweatshop in early 1976 began when Posener and several others (Kate Crutchley and Mary Moore) became the first women to join

the company. However, while the notion of self-oppression – and suggestion of self-loathing – that characterises Mister X is present, the rhetorical call to self-identify appears to be tempered by a more plaintive cry for self-determination:

> Third Woman: You see, all we want to do is live ordinary lives like anyone else. What we want to is to be able to work and live happily together without anyone bothering us. Can't you let us sleep, eat and love the way we want to? We can't help the way we are. We'd much rather be like you, so please don't punish us for being different. We look just like you, don't we? You can't identify us in the street, can you? Well, not unless we dress or behave in a way that might give us away. We do try to be inconspicuous [...]. I'm not ashamed of being a lesbian, of course, I just don't want anybody to know.
>
> (Any Woman Can, 23)

The admission "we'd much rather be like you" can be read in several ways. Initially, this statement might be understood as a desire to no longer be gay women – "we'd much rather be like you [heterosexuals]." However, the collective "we" suggests an alternative inflection, particularly when considered with the second part of the line "so please don't punish us for being *different*." There is the potential here to describe the separation of the politic of public identity from the politic of difference. To state one's sexuality publicly is to enter into that particular, hierarchical system of difference. The character might regret her lesbianism and not want anyone else to know – but I would argue that such regret is strongly linked to the specific revelation of difference encoded in a non-heterosexual identity. While other emphases elsewhere in this text suggest that this particular character is intended to represent those who detrimentally closet themselves – who self-oppress – there is here a further possibility of a subject who regrets being different, but not being a lesbian: a state which offers an explanation for an unwillingness to "come out," but does not necessarily take recourse to a narrative of self-loathing. Instead, this might describe a resistance or uneasiness towards a conventional strategy which argues that the deconstruction of an existing hierarchy requires visibility within it: such a subject's visibility demonstrates the flawed premises on which that hierarchy is constructed.

The task then becomes to find a mode of articulating a rejection of a particular hierarchy or discourse of difference. Such a move recognises a legitimate reluctance to identify strategically, particularly in regard to a persistent awareness that to participate in "coming out" may be to surrender the terms of one's own individuated subjectivity.

Part of this speculation, then, observes how closely the terms of the phrase "out and proud" depend upon each other for definition in the dynamic of "coming out." The proof of pride is in the act of "coming out," stating one's sexual proclivities publicly. To be unwilling to come out is to suggest that a subject feels something other than pride; in this rhetorical struggle there is no space for a *private* non-heterosexual subject who is not somehow marked by shame, doubt or closetedness. While the argument for social visibility as the method of achieving political viability is persuasive, it is also important to consider how that strategy delimits the potential forms non-heterosexual identity might take. The telos of "out and proud" also tends to minimise the process or consequences of "coming out," consequences not exclusively of social isolation that – as has been argued – can persist beyond the original instance of "outing" oneself, or being "outed." Is "coming out" always commensurate with pride, and does it reciprocally follow that being in the closet is always aligned with being not-proud, being ashamed? The narrative of "coming out" may be involved in the production of the stigma of shame for those who remain in the closet.

Twice Over

The uncomfortable relationship between closetedness and privacy marks Jackie Kay's Twice Over, also staged with Gay Sweatshop in 1988. Again, this play resists the presumption of a singular lesbian identity, particularly that which might appear to mimic, through inversion, a heterosexual identity – setting undesirable against desired, feminine against unfeminine and reproductive against unreproductive. There is an attempt to suggest a notion of lesbian identity that produces some of the signifiers of this discourse without reproducing its fixed relationships of power and

(hetero)sexuality. The play opens with a direct, if not blunt, expression of regret from the recently deceased Cora:

> Cora — It is so ironic to be lying next to my husband after all these years. *(She gazes around at the mourners then sits.)* Being dead gives me a new perspective on things. If I could have lived all my life twice over, I would never have pretended.
>
> [...]
>
> You know that funeral really put me through the paces! They were all there, quite a good turn out, wasn't it?, everyone in my life who mattered, commemorating me. Only one small problem – it isn't me they're remembering. I refuse to go through death the same way I went through life. That's expecting too much of a person.[234]

Cora's regret is partially articulated through her granddaughter's discovery of her relationship with a woman, Maeve, initially through a letter and then through other proofs: a glass bought as a souvenir of a trip; a gold necklace given as a gift on an anniversary and – most explicitly – Cora's diaries. Moving from signifier to signifier, the play shifts between recollection of past events, and the re-enactment of those memories. Through that process of recall and return, the play constructs the terms in which Cora and Maeve's relationship has been elided and now reconstructed. Both women have been married, entering into their relationship later in life after those marriages had stalled or ended:

> Maeve — Sean and me didn't have a bad marriage. Course, being a Catholic I don't consider myself divorced. I thought about it a lot at the time, and I decided there was no point in living together anymore. That's what my conscience told me. Sean took it all right in the end. I suppose it was lucky we weren't able to have any kids.
>
> Cora — When I think of how long I was married for before George died, it's staggering. Twenty one years. It's a long time. Well, we were happy enough. It was only through being with Maeve that I realized how much my marriage didn't give me. Twenty one years of my life.

[234] Jackie Kay, "Twice Over," Gay Sweatshop: Four Plays and A Company, ed. Philip Osment (London: Methuen, 1989) 123. Further citations are provided in-text.

(Twice Over, 127)

The return to the past of the relationship also allows the resignification of earlier acts. For Evaki, Cora's niece, the revelation extends backwards as well as forwards in time:

> Evaki I still can't believe it you know. I can't stop remembering things now. Come to think of it, I can't understand why I didn't think of it before. Now that I know, it's all over the shop! Like that time I went round to Nan's early in the morning and she and Maeve were still in their nighties.
>
> (Twice Over, act one)

The emphasis on domestic and familial scenes, including marriage and child-rearing, supports the argument that such social indicators cannot be excluded from an understanding of lesbian identity. Part of this strategy is to minimise the extent to which such identities might be misapprehended as exotic, foreign, strange or otherwise removed from everyday life. Such an emphasis also forms the basis of the view that

> [t]he "lesbian," we have come to understand, does not exist as a monolithic construct but instead is situated in relation to such determinants of class, race, ethnicity, generation, and so on.[235]

Such determinants construct lesbian identity as a "critical site of gender construction rather than as a unitary experience with a single political meaning [...]"; however, this should not be misconstrued as an emphasis of the theoretical over material, political concerns, reading lesbianism not as "an essence or a thing outside of time and place but as a critical space within social structures."[236] Indeed, the narrative of the play focuses on the familial and extra-familial relationships that exist between characters. In or out of the closet, Cora's sexual identity is read in relation to other

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[235] Laura Doan, "What's in and out, out There? Disciplining the Lesbian," American Literary History 6.3 (Autumn 1994): 575.
[236] Shane Phelan 773.

structures of identity and desire that include those which define the perimeters of heterosexuality:

> We must forsake the idea that lesbian sexuality is outside of, or against, or safe from the network of compulsory heterosexuality, bearing in mind Lyotard's warning that being in opposition is one of the modes of participation within a system.[237]

Those relationships are not necessarily prior to desire, but rather before the identification of the object of that desire – "I've been in love with Maeve all these years and I only really found out last night." (Twice Over 133) The creation of a sexual identity is marked here by the identification of a particular system of desire, prior to which exists a presumptive heterosexual object choice. The doubled trajectory of "coming out" – split between Cora and Maeve, Cora and Evaki – allows the construction of a potential lesbian identity to be continually revised and revisited: the terms of Cora and Maeve's identities are determined by the responses of others as much as by the private history of their own relationship. A key aspect of this is Cora's diary, beginning in the year her husband dies and acting as a method of self-discovery and – problematically – a mode in which agency is reconstructed and partially denied. The terms on which her relationship with Maeve is discovered, though constructed through her own words, are not her own.

> Cora I've got no control over it all. It reminds me when I was alive. I thought being dead would be totally different. I want it out in the open once and for all. Not just me, for Maeve.
>
> (Twice Over, act two)

Though Cora intends that her diaries become the means by which her and Maeve's closetedness comes to an end, that transition is still deeply conditional. Cora's posthumous revelation of her sexuality registers for Maeve as a betrayal, one that undermines the apparent closeness of their relationship and crucially denies Maeve the ability to make that choice for herself.

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[237] Shane Phelan 775.

Maeve First you die on me and now these bloody diaries. I'm finished. You can find some other poor fool to grieve for you. What on earth were you doing keeping diaries Cora? Answer me, damn you! You had no business writing about me without telling me. Now my life's an open book as well as yours. Did I not love you enough? Was it not good enough? What did I do to deserve this Cora? I thought we had no secrets from each other.

(Twice Over, act one)

There is also a discrepancy here between the declaration of one's sexuality and the presumption that it indicates absolute openness – Maeve's sense of betrayal arises in part because she has presumed one form of intimacy would guarantee another. Concurrent to a destabilising queer critique of identity labels, then, is a challenge to social expectations of fealty and responsibility: emotional, political and material relationships that may have to be reconsidered and re-examined in terms of the structures of power and representation that they describe.

Care and Control

The struggle to create a viable subjectivity between poles of public pride and private desire run through the narrative of Care and Control, devised by the women's company of Gay Sweatshop and scripted by Michelene Wandor. Though beginning primarily as an "issue" play about the problems of lesbian mothers in custody cases, the play

> ended up raising some searching questions about the dominant assumptions behind family life in order to maintain the status quo of a family pattern which assumes heterosexual, monogamous woman at its centre. The play shows how such "transgression" can range from a woman who chooses a lesbian relationship to a mother who simply wants to live on her own with her child.[238]

[238] Strike While The Iron is Hot – Three Plays on Sexual Politics, ed. Michelene Wandor (London: The Journeyman Press 1980) 13.

Wandor joined the production after the company had spent some months researching primary and secondary material on which the play would be based, occasionally acquiring transcripts of court cases from supportive solicitors. This process entailed:

> interviewing mothers, lawyers, children, speaking to the Association for Lesbian Parents, the Rights of Women (a group of feminist lawyers) and an organisation for one parent families. We taped interviews to use as the basis for the play, and to help the cast with material for improvisations.[239]

The use of primary source material into which characters and narratives will be dramatically interpolated both operates as a functional method of dramaturgy and acts to underwrite the legitimacy and, potentially, realism of the work. In fact, such a work might be said to depend on the visibility of that relationship to emphasise the focus on actual instances of material, political concern rather than abstract or theoretical principal, even when the work draws upon the latter to assert its message:

> The first [act] is about a single mother who loses her child because the father's signature is on the birth certificate. The second – my role – concerns a heterosexual woman with three daughters who becomes a lesbian in the course of the play and loses custody of her daughters because she reads Spare Rib. (This shows how threatening Spare Rib was and how ignorant the judiciary were.) The third concentrates on a working-class lesbian couple.[240]

Having joined the project (after a rough scenario and detailed synopsis had been worked up) to script the play, Wandor's role appears to have been part-way between playwright, dramaturge and editor, "taking [...] characters, scenario and story, writing original material where necessary, editing and tightening and reorganising material we already had."[241] Of particular interest in this method is the reference to "official" accounts – that is to say legal proceedings and formal decisions – of "transgression" as a means of identifying and critiquing previously transparent borders of identity and behaviour. Through this mode of critical practice, the rule of law becomes apparent as the process by which disparate social prejudices and

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[239] Strike While The Iron is Hot 63.
[240] Nancy Diuguid, interviewed by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre, ed. Lizbeth Goodman, Contemporary Theatre Studies Series vol. 17 (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996) 61.
[241] Strike While The Iron Is Hot 63.

unvoiced discriminations acquire a concrete and legitimated public presence. Lizbeth Goodman, writing on Care and Control as part of a wider group of child custody dramas in feminist theatre, observes that the court system appears as likely to confirm or produce discrimination as to challenge it:

> All three women [in Care and Control] locate the source of their problems in the structure and terminology of the court system to which they must appeal for support. This system grants parental custody to the person in the best position to provide "care and control" and considers financial status as the determining factor; furthermore, it fails to provide adequate childcare facilities and full-time jobs for women, and then punishes them for their financial dependency on men.[242]

This feminist critique of systemic relations of power to gender roles is supported by an awareness of the linguistic or symbolic discourses which describe the production and reproduction of such conditions:

> Similarly, Chris (another lesbian mother) points to the phallocentrism of many linguistic terms of abuse applied to lesbians. She observes a social punishment for the transgression of coming out which is directed at lesbians [...] This pejorative labelling is indicative of a heterosexual bias in society, operative in the courts.[243]

Care and Control's structure appears to support a theatricality which directs critical attention towards this formal methodology of control. Act two proceeds through a stylised presentation of court proceedings, overlapping several cases. All of the cast – excepting the women on trial – are dressed identically in red shirts and read from identical black folders. This effect characterises the process of law as impersonal, anonymous and coldly dispassionate, in contrast to the first-person presentations of the women's evidence. The women speak naturalistically and give evidence directly, rather than through counsel, enabling an identification of the audience with these particular characters. It is perhaps unintentional that the combination of naturalised and stylised presentation aligns a sensation of subjective versus objective testimony in favour of the court.

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[242] Lizbeth Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own (London: Routledge, 1993) 127.
[243] Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres 127.

However, the conventions at work in Care and Control appear to align naturalistic presentation with legitimacy and the Real. Act one is similarly divided by convention and style, marked notably by monologues from the central characters that permit a sense of intimacy between audience and performer. Naturalistic, first-person accounts and dialogue are intercut with the voice of "Authority" providing a medico-scientific definition of pregnancy and childbirth. Though perhaps slightly stylistically confused, there is a sense of overlap or participation – that although the personal and formal accounts are set against each other, the legitimacy of the personal account is confirmed through contrast to the impersonality of the official, legal accounts within the play.

If Any Woman Can asserts the possibility of variable, multiple viable lesbian identities – implicitly linking viability with visibility – Care and Control proceeds by recognising potential conflicts between lesbian identity and other social roles, and questioning which systems – cultural and legal – might seek to prohibit the co-existence of those identities. Care and Control's account of legal proceedings also presumes a degree of transparency: the question is not whether these women might or might not be lesbians but whether that identity is compatible with other expectations, primarily relating to those of motherhood. The proceedings reveal a kind of double bind: the assumption that in the event of a separation a child should remain with its mother (couched partially in the rhetoric of child-rearing as exclusively "women's work") and the desire to separate a child from the "damaging" influence of a lesbian mother, articulated variously as fear of social ostracism and the child being raised either gay or with an otherwise distorted understanding of normative gender roles. Therefore, the identity of the lesbian mother occupies a "marginal-mainstream position," because "lesbianism is still seen as an unconventional lifestyle choice [and] motherhood is still revered as a role vital to the maintenance of society."[244] It should, in particular, be noted that in the legal proceedings dramatised in Care and Control, the definition of the role of the mother is closely associated with a fixed heterosexual pairing.

[244] Amy L. Hequembourg and Michael P. Farrell, "Lesbian Motherhood: Negotiating Marginal-Mainstream Identities," Gender and Society 13.4 (August 1999): 541.

Rather than emphasising a desire to see children raised in two-parent families, Goodman identifies that such proceedings engage in the "myth of the 'fit father' (as opposed to the unfit mother)"[245]; furthermore, Goodman argues, production of care and control plays runs the risk of reproducing a model which posits "the mother as a member of a patriarchal unit, in contrast to the rejection of patriarchal structures which is inherent to the lesbian feminist position."[246] In the case of Care and Control, the success of that patriarchal unit is challenged, particularly on the grounds on which it might be shown to celebrate an affirmative or even aspirational role of motherhood for women. In suggesting that men who have separated from their partners and entered into new relationships are more suitable parents – because, it is implied – they are able to offer the stability of a heterosexual relationship and an alternative, heterosexual mother, any celebration of the role of the mother is undercut. Such a logic of mimicry presumes that the relationship between parent (and esepcially mother-figure) and child can be easily transplanted.

The justification of such custody decisions takes force from the supposedly oxymoronic status of lesbian mothers, marked by a sexuality that excludes men and is non-reproductive:

> In part, the incompatibility of the lesbian and mother identities is a consequence of positions taken by radical, second-wave feminists who initially rejected motherhood because of its association with heterosexual procreation and the patriarchal family [...]. But a more important source of the dissonance caused by the identity claims of lesbian-mothers stems from the linking of a culturally legitimate "natural" identity with a less socially accepted one.[247]

In this manner, Care and Control – written over ten years after Any Woman Can – seeks to reveal some very specific political consequences for or borders to lesbian identities, and in doing so acts as a campaign play that addresses specific injustices. The title of the earlier work, Any Woman Can, decrees female agency and also, in its

[245] Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own 127.
[246] Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own 127.
[247] Hequembourg and Farrell 540-1.

unvoiced rejoinder of "become a lesbian," invokes a political allegiance between feminism and lesbianism. Lesbian identity becomes a potential feminist strategy, one of choice, intended to resist the structures of compulsory heterosexuality and in turn, patriarchy.

Care and Control's account of legal process certainly presents a strong case for the relationship between heterosexuality, marriage and the limits of legitimate identities for women. However, in doing so it moves beyond Any Woman Can's logic of simultaneity – that one can be a mother and a dyke and an MP – to present the notion of identities which are simultaneous but not continuous. The notion I am trying to suggest here is that the concept of the "whole woman" – which collapses femininity, heterosexuality and fertility into one essentialised subject – informs our understanding of lesbian subjectivity in a manner that is perhaps quite different to the way in which male homosexuality is inflected, for example, by narratives of fatherhood.[248] The category of "lesbian mothers" produces a disparity between specific sexual acts, histories and sexual identity. The supposed incompatibility of motherhood and lesbianism also informs how the heterosexuality of women is constructed – not primarily as subjects who desire men, but as women who are available as objects of heterosexual (and reproductive) desire. Heterosexuality then becomes a matter of being desired, rather than desiring.

Any Woman Can and Care and Control present "coming out" as a means of establishing a lesbian identity but also describe the discursive limits of such action, limits marked by the available categories for identity recognised within law and by the persistence of the social narratives on which such categorisation rests. Yet, as identification as lesbian or gay does not indicate an abandonment of prior emotional or social commitments (notably of the role of parent), "coming out" necessitates a negotiation of cathexes or investments that goes beyond the need to challenge reiteratively a presumptive heterosexuality.

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[248] It is appropriate to note that a number of the first works (in both touring and lunch-time seasons) of the women's Gay Sweatshop company were concerned with the role of lesbians as mothers and wives; such interest was not mirrored on the part of the male company in an interest in gay men as fathers and husbands.

The Ethics of "Coming Out"

In "An Ethos of Lesbian and Gay Existence" Mark Blasius argues for the political contingency of "coming out" – that there can be no lesbian or gay community not predicated on such activity. Blasius reads "coming out" as a process of "becoming" "in which the individual enters into a field of relationships that constitute the lesbian and gay community". As such, "coming out" should be understood as the basis of an "ethos," a "shared way of life through which lesbians and gay men reinvent themselves, recognize each other, and establish a relationship to the culture in which they live."[249]

The staging of lesbian and gay lives – and the representation of those lives by lesbian and gay actors can be understood within that context. Gay Sweatshop's ideological commitment to lesbian and gay subjects asserting control over the means of their own artistic (re)production can be understood here as participation in Blasius' field of self-determining relationships. The productions staged by Gay Sweatshop and others signal a means of defining a lesbian and gay existence beyond the narrow stereotypes or expectations of mainstream media and performance, and provide an occasion whereby a community might be gathered – so that lesbian and gay subjects might not only recognise their lives on stage but their faces in their audience around them.

The staging of lesbian and gay lives can then be seen – in Blasius's terms – as the necessary activity of a disparate group "constituting themselves as a political community dispersed throughout society [...]."[250] While Blasius disavows the label "lifestyle" in favour of "ethos" on the grounds that "there exist many different lesbian and gay lifestyles, ways of living as gay or lesbian,"[251] he still asserts a collective ethical identity which is performed beyond that community. There is

[249] Mark Blasius, "An Ethos of Lesbian and Gay Existence," Political Theory 20.4 (November 1992): 645.
[250] Blasius 647.
[251] Blasius 651.

perhaps a contradictory quality to the performative practices at work here, the double bind of showing specific, unique lesbian and gay lives which do not conform to stereotype as a means of establishing a functional collectivism. Such activity describes a form of self-recognition that does not depend upon symmetry, but rather the recognition of a register of familiar difference – a dynamic that was recognised in Gay Sweatshop's manifesto commitments to encouraging lesbian and gay subjects to come out and exercise their own acts of self-determination to construct identities which would challenge the limited public images of homosexuality available in mainstream television and theatre.

However, Blasius' concurrent inference of a specific ethical responsibility toward that community is problematic. Defined as "the fundamental political act" for nascent lesbian and gay subjects, Blasius argues that "coming out" acts as a rejection of one's own (pregiven) subjection and leads to the creation of oneself "under *different* historical conditions in relation to, as member of, a community."[252] As such, this social model seems to oversimplify the specific social and historical circumstances from which such subjects might emerge, and to over-emphasise the capacity of "coming out" to re-create the subject under new historical conditions. This emphasis on "new" historical conditions also acts to delimit the persistence of existing social roles which form the demand for reiterative "coming out," not all of which it may be possible or even desirable to deny or re-order.

Care and Control's recognition of different economic circumstances underscores this sense of persistence. The legal system through which subjects are recognised and marked as legitimate or illegitimate also enforces economic sanctions. The right to custody depends not merely on the publicly defined sexuality of the women – whether they are out or not – but upon their level of economic security:

> For example, one of the mothers, when confronted by a hostile ex-partner (the father of her daughter) and challenged with the words "there are alternatives," replies that "you have to be rich to be an alternative."[253]

[252] Blasius 655. Emphasis original.
[253] Goodman, Contemporary Feminist Theatres 127.

Though Blasius recognises the process of "coming out" as an ongoing performative which must be continually revisited, that demand for reiteration does not directly consider why such reiteration is necessary – namely, the persistence of existing historical conditions and cultural narratives, economic circumstances which are inflected by class, race and gender, as well as familial obligations. The "new" historical conditions acquired through "coming out" cannot be read as wholly independent of either the determining values of the closet or the specific discourse of re-invention offered through "coming out", which is in turn informed by a pregiven field of closetedness. The court transcripts which form the basis of Care and Control articulate this problematic persistence. Identification as a lesbian does not wholly replace prior identification, even if that particular combination of gender and sexuality has only been assumed through a normative process. Instead, identification with lesbian or other female non-heterosexual identities presents a conflict with existing social identities as wives and mothers, social roles which may re-invoke a compulsory heterosexuality. Rather than occupying a new historical trajectory, such identities are the product of competing and overlapping social and political discourses.

Care and Control's narratives then present an historically situated attempt to describe how the occupation of an identity within one (presumptively heterosexual) discourse does not abrogate identification as the other; "coming out" does not function to separate a subject from a constituting field or history of heterosexual identities and relationships. The use of legal narratives – of transcripts of real cases within the process of devising the production – describes the necessity of negotiating the threat posed by the acceptance and enforcement of such an incompatibility. In this manner, the rule of law is revealed as a mode in which sexual identity is policed: a means by which a border is enforced between out and not-out identities to the detriment of subjects on both sides of the closet door.

Furthermore, though Blasius defines "coming out" as a ethical decision that an individual must make for his or her self (and argues, problematically, that beyond the explicit revelation of sex acts, no-one can be involuntarily outed) he also establishes

"coming out" as an activity of political and ethical *necessity* for the creation of lesbian and gay communities. The consequence of this positioning is to define the decision to come out as a personal ethical choice, and in turn frame the choice not to come out as unethical: that is, counter to the interests of the group of which a subject denies (in his or her closeted state) being a member of. Such a rhetoric also conceals the degree to which existing ethical commitments may intrude upon a straightforwardly liberationist programme of "coming out." Care and Control directly addresses the potential consequences of "coming out," where the communal and individual gains of assuming a public non-heterosexual identity must be balanced against the consequences of assuming lesbian identity within the discourse of law – namely, the threat to custody rights over one's children.

Impasse

The issue of the representation of lesbians and lesbianism is centred on a queer critical impasse, of seeking a means of engaging with existing modes of representation in order to re-write them without reiterating that same system. The contradictions which emerge in the portrayal of subjectivities multiply marked by femininity, motherhood and lesbianism operate to draw attention to this dysfunction. Therefore, rather than seeking to define an alternative mode of representation that can describe but in some way operate "outside" of a given culture, queer thinking must point towards a functional value for that apparent stalemate. The absence of a true cultural "other," a position which is not indelibly marked by existing structures of power, presents an argument for the instability of an existing framework that depends on a binary of inside/outside for its sense of stable legitimacy. Instead of reading a stable, self-moderating culture which re-absorbs and contains radical potential, we read that same culture as perpetually engaged in acts of symbolic rescue and re-determination, acts that seek to define as permanent that which is continually falling into the sea. The threat posed by alternative identities and roles might even serve to emphasise how close "traditional" models of identity are to collapse.

The notion that representation always conveys more than it intends and is yet never totalizing describes that ongoing process of collapse and recuperation. The signs of cultural hegemony – of traditional identity roles – are not the proof of its fixity or permanence, but proofs of a system continually attempting to reassert itself by translating those roles into that which is Real, original, genuine and productive in the face of rupture, lack and excess. [254] The perpetual claim to the qualities of the Real betrays the extent to which they must be iterated and reiterated.

[254] See Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: the politics of performance (London: Routledge, 1993).

Much of the discussion of performativity within this project has been predicated on an implicit claim to activity beyond the temporal or physical space of a given performance. Though it is possible to discuss politically motivated performance as a political activity in and of itself – as has been suggested in the prior discussion of theatre's involvement in the construction of public identities – the relationship between political theatre and political activism relies upon the recognition and manipulation of a *persistent* relationship between performers and audience that dissolves a rigid barrier between stage action and real-world consequence. The persistence of "coming out" as a performative motif expresses this dynamic, that the gestic, reproducible quality of "coming out" directs critical attention to cultural circumstance in which such action is a necessity. Part of this claim is an attempt to occupy and transform the cultural machinery which is dependent on continual reassertion of existing norms for its own continuation.

Queer performance's deconstructive efforts might then suggest particular kinds of relationship that exist or can be constructed between audience and performer. Part of this relationship is an expectation of reciprocal identity, in regard to the production and reproduction of coming-out narratives, as well as in the identification of legitimate public subjectivities. The audience are read as potential members of the community which the performers seek to represent and reproduce. There is a further degree to which the performative and political methods encoded within queer performance rely upon an audience which is not actively or universally antagonistic. Such a reading of a "queer audience" presumes not only an openness to an "alternative" politic but the capacity of the audience to discover their own counter-hegemonic potential. When a performance is designed or presented to such an audience, with the intention of working some change in that group, that audience are not be directly identified as the source or first cause of homophobic discourse. Though audience members might be asked to identify their own place within such a discourse, they are rarely constructed as the specific origin of, for example, institutionalised prejudice in religious or secular law. A problem that emerges from

this kind of identification is that it can operate to diminish the responsibility of those who tacitly or passively support a cultural hegemony to become agents of change; the idea that a person is not directly responsible is misread as the claim that a person cannot affect direct action.

Concurrently, although a particular form of performance might enjoy strong historical or cultural ties to specific kinds of activism, care must be exercised to avoid reading a given convention as "political" (or persistently radical) without regard for the specific circumstances in which it emerges. In that sense – and to the point of further resisting a homogenisation of queer activity – I want to suggest a history of Pride marches in the UK as a history of competing performative priorities. Recalling Gay Sweatshop's desire to stage "good theatre" before good politics, Pride's trajectory describes a movement away from direct protest activism toward carnival celebration. However, the following history will avoid a simple claim of Pride rendered apolitical, but attempt a more sophisticated recognition of change in the expectations of participants, and in the standards for "success" generated by the organisers.[255] As such, this stage of this project represents a slight change in methodology – away from the direct analysis of written performance texts towards an assessment of the ways in which Pride is organised or staged and, crucially, an assessment of the expectations and responses of those involved in that process.

As this discussion has suggested, a perceptual tension can exist between performance which seeks to be "good theatre" with a political impact, and that which seeks to be "good politics," where choice of performance convention is slave to a particular political agenda. We might characterise "theatre first" productions in terms of consciousness-raising activities, in which a traditional proscenium-style divide between a passive audience and active performers is not dissolved until the close of performance. Any call for action is articulated indirectly through the presentation of either intolerable circumstances which demand resolution, or in the depiction of successful resistance and reform, or future freedoms yet to obtained but within reach. Though such performances might use open discussions or forums after the event as a

[255] For a broader discussion of the professionalisation of gay politics, see Diane Richardson's "Desiring Sameness? The Rise of a Neoliberal Politics of Normalisation," Antipode 37.3 (June 2005).

means of confirming the relationship between theatrical and political action, that tentative divide between spectacle and ideology might seem to suggest that the performance alone does not constitute substantive political action. The use of such post-performance discussion can be contrasted to theatrical forms in which audience participation forms a central part of the methodology, such as in the forum theatres of Augusto Boal.[256]

In contrast to the notion of "theatre first," we could identify a category of political action which explicitly confirms performance or spectacle as the primary substance of political action. Rather than the performance producing the impetus for change through the reproduction of "exemplar" circumstances, the performance articulates and carries out specific and concrete demands for reform. This emphasis, which might also be characterised by action "zaps," sit-ins or protest marches, describes a more antagonistic relationship towards its audience, marked by a specific sense of an audience who are read as much a part of the problem as potential agents of political reform. Though sympathetic individuals might witness such performances they are not taken to constitute the target audience of civic leaders, policy makers and religious figures to which such action is more directly addressed.

However, such a tentative categorisation of performativity of protest on the grounds of antagonistic or (self-) identifying audiences and the construction of mutually opposed methodologies offers limited critical opportunities. The notion of performance as direct action should not be collapsed into a theory of singular engagement between performers and spectators. Instead, Baz Kershaw argues that

> the central focus of protest dramaturgy shifted in the early seventies away from the modernist notion of an attack on a known enemy in the name of revolutionary progress towards a more improvisatory and hyper-real scenario style. Although protest was still directed against authority, it increasingly aimed to produce for both participants and spectators an image or an experience that gave a glimpse of the future as pure freedom from the

[256] See Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors (London: Routledge, 1992) for a full description of the conventions of forum theatre, which stresses a participatory rather than spectatorial role for the audience as "spect-actors" who are encouraged to become involved in the dramatic action – and in doing so, attempt to re-write the social and political narratives being staged.

> constraints of the real, a hint of utopia at the very moment at which it engaged in the messy business of street marches and street camps.[257]

Kershaw's assertion that earlier forms of protest dramaturgy were less improvisatory is problematic, or at the least unclear. Planned or structured actions – even those marked by specifically identified outcomes – do not preclude improvisatory content; the limits of any such performance may even increase under the generic demands of the "hyper-real." Furthermore, though protest dramaturgy may operate to produce a public persona for a group or issue (and that improvisatory techniques might tend towards disposable performance which resists exact reproduction) it does not follow that the modes of identification offered by such conventions are ahistorical, or that improvisation has a greater claim on the staging of utopianism.

While contemporary protest "almost always assumes an audience, onlookers for whom events are 'played out,'"[258] that performative action recognises the presence of its own performers as subjects to whom the action is directed. In the midst of a performance which seeks to address an authoritarian other with the demand for change, individual performers are able to confirm or challenge their own place within that discourse and begin to discover the limits of any possible "utopian" future: "[i]t is almost always other-directed, and therefore often reflexively aware of its own sometimes all too real action."[259] This chapter, then, seeks to place a history of queer protest as performative event within this theoretical context, identifying a potentially problematic emphasis on spectacle within events such as Pride. Reading spectacle as a thing exhibited as an object of curiosity or contempt and recognising "that the same display of excess can be the subject of rapture and disgust," this discussion will track a shift of emphasis from protest to celebration and attempt to identify how this change in performative and political ideology might relate to a growing commercial involvement in large scale action within the queer community.[260] Cutting through

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[257] Baz Kershaw, "Fighting in the streets: dramaturgies of popular protest, 1968-1989," New Theatre Quarterly 13.51 (August 1997) 260.
[258] Kershaw, "Fighting in the streets" 260.
[259] Kershaw, "Fighting in the streets" 260.
[260] See Baz Kershaw's The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention (London: Routledge, 1992) for a discussion of carnival activity, agit prop and community theatre in relation to mainstream political campaigns, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

this anatomy of protest is an awareness of the disjuncture between methodologies of alienation – which direct critical attention to the social structures of oppression – and those which seek a primary identification; that is, a tension between identification, and the productive context of available identities. However, though the practice of protest has been marked by contrasting performative conventions, a reading of that tension must resist the oppositional categories of "activist" and "aesthetic" performance.

Pride in the UK has acquired a problematic relationship to the politics of queer interests. Initially triggered in sympathy for the Stonewall Riots in New York, Pride in the UK emerged in 1972 in the context of specific political campaigns mounted by groups such as the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Focussing closely on programmes of legal and social reform, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the equalisation of age of consent and partnership rights, those campaigns determined a specific political function for the performative actions constituting Pride. That functionality was expressed through an emphasis on visibility as a means to representation, self-determination and liberation – through the belief that "coming out" could be the manifestation of collective political action. Earlier movements toward legal reform (notably in the 1957 British Government study known as the Wolfenden Report[261] which proposed the decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private) had been superseded in the 1960s by a widening movement of collective political activism across Europe:

> What was new was the consequential stress on homosexuality as a political issue. With this came a new emphasis on the oppression of gay people, a belief that the taboo against homosexuality was so deeply embodied in Western civilisation (the "Judaeo-Christian culture") that only a revolutionary overthrow of its structures could truly liberate the homosexual. Furthermore, this could not be done by others *for* the homosexual, but only by homosexuals themselves, acting openly and together.[262]

[261] The Wolfenden Report is named after Lord Wolfenden, the chairman of the Home Office committee who produce the study. The much less commonly used and official title is "Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution."
[262] Weeks 186. Emphasis original.

Pride's claim to political efficacy was a product of this rationale, of gay people acting collectively and openly. However, the earlier and directly political forms of Pride in the UK – where visibility operated as the means and product of direct action on a specific issue – appear to have given way in the 1990s to an alternative political performativity where visibility operated as desirable end in itself.

Pride and Pragmatism

The London South Bank University lesbian and gay staff association, the "Knitting Circle," maintains a history of the development of Pride marches in the UK and US:

> The first lesbian and gay pride march in the USA took place on 28th June, 1970 in New York City and four other cities, commemorating the Stonewall Rebellion a year earlier. In New York the march started in Waverly Place near Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village and proceeded to Central Park, with about 2000 people taking part. About 1200 people took part in the march in Los Angeles. The first marches in London were organised by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The first ever public gay protest in Britain took place on 27th November 1970 when approximately 80 GLF members gathered for a torchlight demonstration on Highbury Fields in what was then the working class area of Islington. [...] In August 1971 the GLF organised a further public event when members marched along Islington's Upper Street back to Highbury Fields. This was an exclusively GLF event but led to the first real Pride in London in 1972.[263]

While the first marches were organised as a primarily commemorative event, Pride quickly acquired a specific agenda; the march in 1971 ended with a rally in Trafalgar Square protesting the unequal age of consent for gay men.

> The first march in London billed as Gay Pride was held on 1st. July, 1972. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s the attendance at London Pride events rarely exceeded 1000, but by the time the festival transferred to Jubilee Gardens in 1986 the attendance had risen to about 10,000.
>
> In 1985 the number of marchers on the London Pride parade swelled to 15000 as it included contingents from mining communities returning the solidarity and support of lesbians and gay men during the 1984-5 miners' strike. By 1988, when Section 28 became law about 40000 people attended

[263] South Bank Lesbian and Gay Staff Association, "Pride history," The Knitting Circle, 28 Aug. 2001. 20 Apr. 2006 <http://myweb.lsbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/pridehistory.html>.

> the London Pride event. The late 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of Lesbian Strength which scheduled a separate march.[264]

Pride's role as a primarily political event is confirmed by adherence to a specific agenda and through association to or solidarity with a sympathetic and recognised group whose political ends were compatible with the Pride community's own.

Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) originated from a collection taken at the 1984 Pride March. Shortly afterwards a meeting was held at the University of London Union with speakers from the South Wales National Union of Miners (NUM), leading to the formation of LGSM as a single-issue group which sought to support the miners and their communities.

Though the LGSM was a single-issue group formed in support of the miners' strike – and lasted only for the duration of the 1984-5 action – the activity of raising support for the miners would also offer the opportunity to tackle prejudice in the mining communities, which had been perceived as traditionally homophobic:

> During its two years of operation LGSM raised twenty thousand pounds, from collections, jumble sales, merchandise and sponsored bike rides such as pedal against pit closures. A Pits & Perverts benefits gig headlined by Bronski Beat held in Camden, London raised five thousand pounds. The success of the LGSM was illustrated by the 1985 Pride march, which was headed by a NUM banner, followed by a large contingent of men, women and children from Dulais.[265]

Though not directly identifying as theatrical, LGSM relied upon various performative strategies in their work of consciousness- and fund-raising – notably in the choice of organised events which sought to construct a sense of solidarity with the mining community, demonstrating that unity not only to other members of the mining community but to a wider public audience. While involving a great deal of spontaneity, the events organised by the LGSM should be recognised as being marked by specific scripts or scenarios which recognise – implicitly or explicitly – that they operate within a public domain. That is, such action is not entirely reflexive but directed towards an "other"; the events are expected to be seen by those not

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[264] South Bank Lesbian and Gay Staff Association, "Pride history."
[265] Archives Hub, "Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners," 20 Apr. 2006 <http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk/news/0403lgsm.html>.

directly involved in the event and that sense of public visibility must be understood as part of the intended political function beyond the immediate aim of fund raising.

This strategic allegiance was also heavily marked by class, a mobilisation of support dependent on specific economic and social groups. The work of LGSM embodied a specific kind of utopianism, one that recognises a functional symmetry between controlling the terms of one's labour and terms of one's identity – and that a unionised attempt to assert self-determination will lead to greater freedoms overall. The events organised by LGSM might then to be said to have worked to raise or add to the public profile of the issue of the strike, to confirm the political legitimacy of both the miners and LGSM's struggles and to confront homophobia through the learning of mutual respect rather than direct antagonism. Much of the efficacy of these effects relied upon the local or immediate actions of LGSM being recognised as part of a broader social and political discourse, not least a historically specific class structure strongly marked by unionised labour.[266] Indeed, it was through the recognition of that political continuity that reciprocal support could be offered by the mining community to Pride during the mid-1980s when the mobilisation of a politically motivated lesbian and gay community could be read be in the context of the introduction of Section 28,[267] a galvanizing force acting in much the same way as the pit closures. The struggle for workers' rights and homosexual equality shared a prescient, urgent call for action.

"The party has lost its soul"

However, this politically pragmatic unity between the lesbian and gay community and other distinct political groups marks only the first generation of Pride-identifying activism and the beginning of a series of shifts in political emphasis and performative strategy. Though links remain between politically active members of the gay, lesbian

[266] More recent associations of sexuality and trade unionism have centred more specifically on the labour rights of HIV-positive workers. See Amber Hollibaugh and Nikhil Pal Singh, "Sexuality, Labour, and the New Trade Unionism," Social Text 61 (Winter 1999).

[267] Section 28 is the commonly used name for Section 2a of the Local Government Act 1986 which passed into law in 1988. This section prohibited local authorities in England and Wales from "promoting" homosexuality and labelled homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship." Section 28 was successfully repealed in Scotland in 2000 (following the devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament) and in the rest of the UK in 2003.

and transgender community and other political concerns – notably campaigners on other issues relating to equality, such as sex and race but also environmental and anti-nuclear groups – the trade in political currency and a working-class utopianism embodied by LGSM has not been repeated. This is in part due to the decline of the political authority of unionised action after the 1984-5 miners' strike, but also demonstrates an apparent change in the strategy of choice of politically active gay men and women.

One identifiable element of this transition is that the name given to Pride in London has changed several times since the early 1980s, from "London Pride" or "London Gay Pride" in 1985 to the more specifically inclusive "London Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride" in 1996. A further change in 1999 appeared to remove any direct reference to non-heterosexual or anti-heterosexist concerns, branding the march as "London Mardi Gras," in imitation of large and successful events of the same name in Sydney. While the headline inclusion of homosexuality returned in the 2004 "Big Gay Out," the idea of "Mardi Gras" – a parade or carnival rather than a march – persisted as a dominant format. There are now Mardi Gras-themed, gay-positive events in several other UK cities, including Manchester and Cardiff. Though many of these events retain a reference to the lesbian and gay community in their title – as in the "Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras" or the "Cardiff-Wales Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras," the focus on issue-led campaign politics embodied in the first incarnations of Pride appears to have been minimised.

The change in name has coincided with – or perhaps reflected – a transition from an event focussed singularly on a public march to the march operating as part of day of events including a "festival" as well as themed music and club nights. The subsidiary events surrounding the march have grown rapidly in number since the inception of Pride, consequently leading to concern from within the gay community that the march has become sidelined and rendered politically irrelevant – a fear that the spectacle of the parade has replaced the ideological content of the march.

A survey conducted amongst its readership by OutUK in the aftermath of the 2001 London Mardi Gras revealed that of the respondents who attended the "main events,"

only a minority attended the march (29%) with a far larger proportion (45.2%) attending the "Mardi Gras Main Event" – a ticketed mini-festival of music, comedy and other live acts. In response to a question asking what the main point of any Pride event in 2003 should be, "visibility" and "reinforcing a sense of community" scored strongly with the support of 45.2% and 41.9% respectively of all respondents. Conversely, "campaigning" received only 19.4% of the support of those surveyed, well below "enjoyment," "raising money for charity" and "celebrating success and identity."[268] Furthermore, though the survey asked if the event should be "more or less 'political' than it was five or ten years ago" – with the majority expressing the opinion it should remain as political – no direct enquiry was made as to how that political identity had been manifested or could be maintained in the future.

If contemporary celebration of Pride is to be read as a political event, the performance of that political quality takes a very different form than that embodied in the tradition of the protest march. If the protest marches of the 1970s and 80s were marked by struggle – protest directed at specific figures or groups who stand between those protesting and a possible, future utopia – contemporary Pride emphasises the celebratory staging of that utopia. In the place of producing a site of direct action and change, Pride's emphasis on the potential of celebratory events appears to have transformed the primary function of the Pride march as a performative tool of political action in its own right. Political content has become a subsidiary, or secondary, element of that performance.

A series of interviews accompanying the OutUK survey provide several distinct perspectives on Pride, including those of Peter Tatchell, gay-rights activist and a co-organiser of the original Pride in 1972; Angela Mason, the Executive Director of Stonewall; and John Hamilton, chair of Manchester's Village Business Association. Tatchell's response highlights a concern that the event had moved away from its original purpose:

> Homophobia is not as rampant as three decades ago, but it's still evident in queer suicides, blackmail, job discrimination and hate attacks. So long as

[268] "What Future for Pride in the UK?" OutUK, 15 Mar. 2005 <http://www.outuk.com/content/features/pridesurvey/index4.html>.

> prejudice remains, we need to celebrate our sexuality and press the case for human rights.
>
> Pride should be about queer visibility, defiance and equality, as well as being an exuberant, fun celebration and a wild, hedonistic party. The two different strands are not incompatible. However, the main London event at least has now become depoliticised and over-commercial. It is not much different from the many other summer pop festivals, such as Reading and Glastonbury. The party has lost its soul.[269]

Tatchell has remained among the most persistent and vocal critics of the direction Pride has taken since the early 1990s – yet has also frequently argued that Pride can manifest both political and carnival qualities. Though not objecting to commercial involvement in principal, Tatchell argued in the 2002 survey that all sponsors should "be required to sign up to a basic commitment to oppose discrimination, both in their own employment practices and in terms of parliamentary legislation." Instead of seeking to resuscitate or return to the original format of a march serving the purposes of a campaigning drive, Tatchell provides a potential strategy for a celebratory, carnivalesque Pride to wield a political influence and to procure a degree of assurance that business interest in the lesbian and gay community was not entirely pragmatic. To require the commitment of business to queer-positive practices might allow a political agenda to operate within a commercialised discourse.

Angela Mason, in contrast, argued that Pride was no longer "directly political but successful Prides do demonstrate the strength of the LGBT community. [...] The success of [Pride] has been important in getting LGBT issues on those political maps." Though not directly relating the marked increase in the cost of the event, and the associated involvement of commercial sponsorship with a sense of political devaluation, Mason notes that large scale events in London no longer have the status of being a national event, lacking a sense of local community:

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[269] Peter Tatchell, "OutSpoken," OutUK, 15 Mar. 2005 <http://www.outuk.com/index.html?http://www.outuk.com/content/features/pridesurvey/>.

> [w]here Prides have a clear purpose and clear connection with the communities they spring from this can be dealt with, but without that anchorage they can become too expensive and too commercial.[270]

It is slightly unclear how the connection between gay-owned, operated or friendly businesses within a given community is to be guaranteed, or such a purpose is to be enforced – rendering sponsorship from large, national and international companies problematic. It does suggest, however, that the involvement of commercial sponsorship might demand the definition of criteria (such as in the strategy advocated by Tatchell) that could confirm the suitability of some sponsors and the inappropriateness of others.

John Hamilton's opinion as a prominent gay businessman is interesting in that he confirms the necessity of a campaigning agenda but disavows the role that a modern Pride or Mardi Gras might play in it.

> Room for improvement? The quality of entertainment could be better and we could do with creating a greater understanding of what Mardi Gras is about. The trust needs to be put back into Mardi Gras – it has been put back into the hands of the community. Yes, it makes money, but it's more about putting the heart back into the Gay Village, strengthening community and raising funds for charity.
>
> Politically, we still have a lot to fight for and make people aware of. We may be more visible and outspoken, but still don't have equal rights as heterosexual couples. However, I think Mardi Gras has gone from being a political event into a party. From what we see, we get the impression that most young people do not align themselves to a political party these days, although we know some do. And a lot of people aren't after a protest, just a fabulous long weekend. Unlike "Pride" events in other cities – Birmingham or Brighton – we are not shouting about rights, this is a Lesbian and Gay party, showing the diversity within the City of Manchester.[271]

Given his position (which celebrates the capacity to party over the somewhat belittling "shouting about rights") it could be argued that events like the Manchester Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras have little more than a cosmetic resemblance to the 1972 Pride or successive generations of campaign-led marches. There is also a

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[270] Angela Mason, "Outspoken," OutUK, 15 Mar. 2005 <http://www.outuk.com/index.html?http://www.outuk.com/content/features/pridesurvey/>.
[271] John Hamilton, "Outspoken," OutUK, 15 Mar 2005 <http://www.outuk.com/index.html?http://www.outuk.com/content/features/pridesurvey/>.

degree to which political engagement is misread or delimited as support for a particular political party. Hamilton also asserts that "sponsorship wasn't about making Mardi Gras commercial," justifiably proud of the capacity of the organisers to commit to a large event without incurring any debt. However, the emphasis on successful business "management" of the event, where the degree of success or failure can be measured by a balance sheet, further suggests a separation from a specific, issue-led political agenda. Issues are presented as important, but perhaps not as important as having a good time and balancing the accounts.

If one of the primary aims in organising an event like Mardi Gras is that it might be revenue neutral (raising no profit and incurring no debts), such a specific form of success is dependent on a similarly specific community that can afford to participate:

> The cost to the public for events over Manchester Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras 2002 was very little. Yes you had to pay to get into clubs, but the prices weren't hiked up substantially - any price changes were relative to their extended opening hours, acts booked, and the donations to charity from door entry fee.[272]

The costs to the public may not have been increased "substantially," but the default cost of bar or club entry remains. The emphasis on well-managed, pay-for-entry events (over any free activities that may have been offered) tends to mask here both the limitations placed on participation – for those unwilling or unable to – and the realisation that "Pride-as-Mardi Gras," in Manchester at least, is no longer a primarily free, public event: events without admission charge and in public are the minority rather than the norm.

The shift of the criteria for a "successful" Pride or Mardi Gras might be taken to stem from a series of London Prides in the late 1990s in which the financial competence of the organisers was challenged. The 1997 Pride festival attracted "more than 300,000 people and generated a record £400,000 in sponsorship and voluntary collections,"[273] but ended in collapse with debts of more than £160,000. While this triggered the voluntary liquidation of the Pride Trust, the 1997 event had in some ways been the

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[272] John Hamilton, "Outspoken."
[273] Heather Mills, "Gays break ranks over 'straight' Pride march," Observer 21 Dec. 1997: 8.

victim of its own success, with 250,000 people turning up to the festival on Clapham Common, leaving the original trust with clean-up costs of £20,000.[274] The allegations of mismanagement in 1997 were not primarily characterised in terms of the event having become isolated from its community but in the inability to manage the financial responsibilities of such an event.

Though some critics argued that the official Pride Trust had become "too straight," the proposed solution was couched in terms of greater financial control. In response to the perception that Pride had become apolitical and had "sold out" to commercial interests with no real interest in gay issues or community, a rival bid to run the event the event was made by a consortium of gay business leaders called "National Pride." Further motivation for alternative organisers stemmed from the perception that negotiations over Pride's future had taken place behind closed doors:

> Thud, the gay magazine, has accused the Trust of "treating the community with contempt with its 'not in front of the children' policy." And while some members have been threatening to call an extraordinary meeting, others have been throwing their weight behind the rival National Pride, led by gay club promoter Kevin Millins.
>
> He has promised to "reclaim pride" and [...] announced a share scheme for National Pride to ensure that lesbians and gays had a stake in securing its future and that any potential profits would be passed via a charitable trust back into the community.[275]

However, despite the support of various figures within the gay community, the company that emerged to run the events – Pride UK – was forced to cancel the festival of the following year amid claims that it could not afford the staging costs. The decision to charge £5 for entry to what had previously been a free event had produced poor ticket sales, with less than a third of the 100,000 tickets sold two weeks before the event.[276] Combined bills of £25,000 for the policing of the event and £150,000 for the hire of Clapham Common – including a refundable deposit that had been increased from £50,000 to £75,000 – drained a limited cash resource, forcing postponement and eventual cancellation. The march, involving Stonewall,

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[274] Mat Wells, "Gay pride drops politics in favour of pleasure," The Scotsman 2 Jun. 1999: 7.
[275] Mills 7.
[276] Philip Hensher, "Time for some gay abandon; It won't be long before we have openly gay bishops, generals, even footballers. Who cares, really?" The Independent 3 Jul. 1998: 5.

the Equality Alliance and fifty other groups, went ahead as planned, apparently untouched by financial difficulties.

The re-branding of London Pride as Mardi Gras in 1999 under a further group of gay businesses led by Kelvin Sollis (publisher of The Pink Paper and Boyz) led to fresh accusations reported in The Guardian that the event had become depoliticised, and provoked the appearance of the idea of an unsponsored, fringe alternative:

> Peter Tatchell of the gay rights group OutRage! said the political and human rights agenda of previous marches had been ditched in favour of a "dumbed-down, spandex and sequins, Rio-style carnival." After the parade he and others would go instead to Old Compton Street in Soho scene of the bomb attack on a gay pub in April for a "massive open-air DIY festival."
>
> "A lot of people in the community have decided they don't want to attend the festival because they feel it has betrayed the ideals of Pride," he said.[277]

Tatchell's criticisms of Mardi Gras would appear to gain validity from the organisers' own assertions that "It's a parade, not a march," and that the event would be "more about dancers and costumes."[278]

Interestingly, though disagreeing strongly over the emphasis on celebration over politics, voices in both camps argued – and continue to argue – that a successful combination of the two was possible. While an OutRage! spokesman argued in The Scotsman's coverage that the march had shifted "away from the political to the hedonistic," he also conceded that the two elements could be accommodated as long as the "real basics of Pride" were not sacrificed. In the same report, Anthony McNeill, the event's general manager emphasised that while society was more tolerant, it was still important for a political message to be heard:

> There are important messages to be brought home, but events such as the Sydney Mardi Gras have shown that you can get these messages across in a different way. The key is visibility, and with a colourful parade you get on the front pages, on the news bulletins.[279]

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[277] Will Woodward, "Hardline gays attack 'dumbed down' festival," The Guardian 3 Jul. 1999: 14.
[278] Woodward 14.
[279] Wells, 7.

It is, however, unclear exactly which messages that images of a colourful parade were intended to articulate.

Spectacle and Power

It is possible to read the capacity of Pride and its predecessors to generate public spectacle as an expression of the empowerment of lesbian and gay subjects. Aida Hozic suggests that spectacle as a socio-political category has "always been the exclusive patrimony of the official power,"[280] as opposed to the popular ritual of theatre. The notion of spectacle embodied in Pride might be understood as a realignment of a traditional hierarchy, a tradition wherein "the actors and the audience in the spectacle are physically separated, and participation is replaced by the observation of breathtaking events which can be admired or feared."[281] Pride permits for observation and participation to occur simultaneously, allowing those involved to become objects of that spectacle as well as witnesses to it.

Baz Kershaw suggests in his paper "Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism," that spectacle has had a problematic relationship with traditional dramatic forms, that "the dominant traditions of Western theatre have aimed to tame spectacle, to incorporate spectacle in a reduced form into their disciplinary regimes."[282] Kershaw's argument, which also suggests that spectacle be thought of in terms of its relationship to power (tentatively offering categories of spectacles of domination, resistance, contradiction and deconstruction) describes a role for spectacle within a Bakhtinian carnivalesque system of containment:

> Hence, the spectacular in theatre has been mostly in fact anti-spectacle, because the disciplinary mechanisms of the theatre have automatically undermined the extreme force of the powers, but especially the ambivalent powers, that spectacle is designed to carry. This is why desire for spectacle – whether in state ritual or street carnival or both – frequently has constructed specially-designed buildings or designated areas for its production: from the

[280] Aida Hozic, "Social and Political Responses to Terrorism," Terrorism and Modern Drama, eds. John Orr and Dragan Klaic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990) 66.
[281] Hozic 66-7.
[282] Baz Kershaw, "Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism," Theatre Journal 55.4 (2003): 601.

> amphitheatres of Roman antiquity, through the natural science museums and Winter Gardens of nineteenth-century England, and to the theme parks, Millennium Domes, and Olympic stadiums of today.[283]

This historical tradition offers a reading of "Pride-as-Mardi Gras" that recognises the structures of good management and organisation as the potential means of containment or limitation of any radical potential. This reading clearly diverges from the culturally specific reading of plebeian culture in Elizabethan theatre within a feudal hierarchy, as exemplified in Michael D. Bristol's discussion of institutions of theatre in that period. Instead, the notion of carnivalesque containment is used to indicate an examination of how a system of celebration and containment might operate in a cultural system heavily marked by discourses of visibility versus invisibility, and legitimacy versus illegitimacy. Bristol's examination of carnival time as a generic structure allows for an awareness of certain implicit and persistent modes of power and representation:

> Carnival is a conservative process most of the time, used to regulate social behaviour of various kinds. What carnival interprets and reinforces are the standards and expectations of the community [...].[284]

Carnival activity is not separate from or outside of the cultural expectations of a community; instead, carnival occupies a liminal space that prevents a final determination of such festivity as either protest or catharsis. Any radical potential in carnival might then be properly recognised as an act of negotiation, interpreting social discipline but also "putting a limit to the supervision that may be imposed from without by the state or by any association of powerful and privileged interests."[285]

The active decisions taken by organisers of and participants in Pride events are therefore of particular significance, given that the primary community to which expectations and images of legitimacy and action are played out is the gay

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[283] Kershaw, "Curiosity or Contempt: On Spectacle, the Human, and Activism" 601.
[284] Michael D Bristol, "Carnival and the Institutions of Theater in Elizabethan England," ELH 50.4 (Winter 1983): 646.
[285] Bristol 646.

community. Both readings of "Pride as protest" and "Pride as celebration" rely upon a relationship not only between the participants and onlookers on the street, but a spectatorial relationship within the community convened by the event, as the lesbian and gay community plays out and reinforces its own expectations to itself.

Law, Disorder and Consumption

Before any major Pride or Mardi Gras event can take place (such as in any of the UK's major cities), a series of negotiations must take place with local authorities, in the form of both the council and the police, to confirm that certain requirements have been met. These requirements must be met either directly (financially) through bonds for the use of a particular piece of land or through assurances, for example, that the event will not breach the peace. The spectacle of Pride occurs within very specifically agreed parameters and, since the change in nature of Pride and of public order laws since the 1980s, that agreement is bordered far more directly by the rule of law than in earlier incarnations of the event.

Under UK law six day's advance notice must be given of a march, specifically if the procession is intended to demonstrate support for or opposition to the views or actions of any group, publicise a cause or campaign, or mark or commemorate an event. Furthermore:

> The police have the power to impose conditions on the march. You are entitled to challenge these if you wish, but if the conditions amount to only minor alterations to the route you should consider carefully whether this is necessary. If a protest march occurs regularly at the same time along the same route, then no notice is required.
>
> Notice also need not be given if it is not reasonably practical to do so in advance, to make allowance for spontaneous marches. In these circumstances, a last-minute telephone call to the police is advisable to show you are following the spirit of the law. A record should be kept of the call.[286]

[286] BBC, "How to organise a protest," 13 Apr. 2005, BBC iCan 14 May 2005 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ican/A1930916>.

Though the right to free assembly, peaceful protest and free expression are codified more by omission than by specific citation of liberty (being perhaps shaped primarily by the criminal acts set out in the Public Order Act 1986, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998), those rights are now rarely an issue of contention in the organisation of "professional" Pride events. It is in the ability of professional organisers to work within such limits that a sense of their professional competence is derived. To take a literal reading of the terms of Terry Eagleton's examination of carnival, Pride is "a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony."[287]

The very nature of the contemporary Pride festival or Mardi Gras requires careful and deliberate planning from many months ahead of the event. The rise of commercial involvement – or more specifically, the risk to investment – has also produced a demand for careful, professional planning. This does not mean that professional event management necessarily excludes political or radical action; it is, rather, an argument that the demand for this particular form of professionalism has been produced by a specific and gradual shift in the criteria for a "successful" event. Part of this success is negotiating the necessary permissions from local authorities, guaranteeing that any act of protest will proceed within accepted boundaries. Furthermore, this mode of professionalism (in both the financial management of the event and of the necessary relationships to state authority) would appear to facilitate – particularly in the absence of any clearly articulated primary political function – the protection and promotion of commercial involvement.

However, the relationship between commercial and political interests may not be immediately antagonistic; the idea of Pride-as-Mardi Gras may not be entirely enslaved to commercial priorities which do not reflect those of the lesbian and gay community. Alexandra Chasin argues that market processes developed in the 1990s should be identified as "perhaps the most accessible mechanisms for many gay people in the process of individual identity formation and entrance into identity

[287] Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin: Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verso, 1981) 148. Emphasis original.

group affiliation."[288] Beyond such processes acting as a means for self-identification, Chasin further argues that "group based activity in the marketplace is dependent on and essential to political organizing for legal rights and protections based on identity." The appearance of a group of subjects made legitimate as niche consumers offers the framework for formal, legal recognition: "[t]he commodities on sale become the entire machinery of citizenship."[289]

However, in drawing upon David Evans' 1993 study, Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities, Chasin provides grounds for a belief that such group based activities might be limited by those terms of consumption. Available modes of political action are here determined by criteria beyond a sense of issue-led success and more closely associated with the model of successful financial management – in essence, strategies which are profitable in a primarily monetary sense. Chasin's observation that the "corollary effect is that consuming becomes a form of political participation, perhaps supplanting other, more direct, models of participation"[290] provides some explanation for the shift in participatory, performative activities surrounding Pride and its successors. There is a sense, both symbolically and literally, that the product of this consumption can only be sold successfully to those who can afford to buy.

Yet participants and organisers alike continue to assert a political value of some kind for the event. Therefore, rather than claiming that this belief is merely misplaced, it is perhaps more useful to consider how the terms of political engagement might have changed. Part of the transition from early marches to current festival forms has seen the retention of certain performative conventions – in particular with an emphasis on spectacle – but a change in what those acts are intended to do or represent. There is, then, a historical trajectory describinng a relationship of Pride to discourses of power that can be articulated in terms of particular performative strategies. In the earliest forms, Pride identifies and is identified as a march in service of a specific issue,

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[288] Alexandra Chasin, "Interpenetrations: A Cultural Study of the Relationship between the Gay/Lesbian Niche Market and the Gay/Lesbian Political Movement," Cultural Critique 44 (Winter 2000) 151.
[289] Chasin 141.
[290] Chasin 142.

initiated in memory of the Stonewall riots in New York but driven by a call for a definite policy outcome: equality in the age of consent for gay men and women. Though the march can be read as the indirect means to a particular end, that dynamic is supported by the role of the march as an awareness raising activity – a public rallying point for potential members and supporters of a lesbian and gay community.

The staging of that nascent community in public might also be read as a means of constructing that community's legitimacy, both in terms of being seen in the public domain but also in a display of both the numbers of people identifying or sympathetic to that community and the diversity of the same. The performative effort of that generation of marches is also primarily aimed outside of its participants, to the wider community but – in keeping with a demand for political functionality – seeking to address particular imagined and real figures wielding power. The performative aspect of the event – that is to say, being seen – is not the totality of the political action.

Lysistrata Project

This school of (performative) strategy might therefore be held in contrast to spectacle, which is intended to form political action in and of itself. The spectacle does not articulate a message: the spectacle is the message. A functional example of such an approach might be found in the 2003 Lysistrata Project: 1,029 synchronised readings in fifty-nine countries of Aristophanes' anti-war comedy to protest the Bush administration's unilateral war against Iraq.[291] In London, the day was planned to:

> start with a performance at 11.00am in Parliament Square of a "Massed Greek Chorus of Disapproval," made up by members of the British performing arts community who are opposed to war and will include actors, directors, singers, musicians, playwrights. Several high profile members of the theatre community are planning to add their voice to this chorus. [...]

[291] The Lysistrata Project, 20 May. 2005 <http://www.lysistrataproject.com>.

> The day in London will culminate in a public reading of Tony Harrison's Lysistrata - The Common Chorus Part I at The Pleasance Theatre [...] Proceeds to War Child.[292]

Though drawing on a different (but potentially overlapping) political community than Pride, the Lysistrata Project emerges from a similar tradition of mass protest and makes strongly familiar claims on collective activism as a means of affecting mainstream political processes. The Lysistrata Project's choice of Aristophane's comedy is not uncontroversial, however – a decision that chooses to ignore the absence of women or the role of women as chorus within the classical theatrical tradition from which the play emerges. The potential misogyny of Aristophane's parodic use of women's voices is set aside for a claim on political autonomy: individuals are given a voice through collective participation.

Of significance here is the billing of the event as an action taken by "theatre professionals" to voice dissent against the war, with a presumed reciprocal audience of amateur status. The particular mode of involvement with the Lysistrata Project in the UK should be recognised within the context of other professional theatrical action, in particular the series of "Collateral Damage" evenings hosted by the National Theatre throughout March of 2003. Staged as free events which "illuminate, examine, satirise and grapple with the issues that surround the impending war on Iraq," the original Collateral Damage led to a further series of events involving high profile members of the British theatrical community:

> *Collateral Damage II*
> The second in a series of free early evening events, informally staged at the National Theatre, in which a wide range of artists present their responses to the ongoing global situation. The series aims to illuminate, examine, satirise and grapple with the issues that surround the impending war on Iraq.
>
> With contributions from Eileen Atkins, Kevin Day, Anna Maxwell Martin, Bill Nighy (reading a new piece by Joe Penhall), Corin Redgrave (reading a new poem by Harold Pinter), Vanessa Redgrave singing "Stormy Weather"

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[292] "London Anti-War Protest," 2 Mar. 2003, The British Theatre Guide, 19 May. 2005 <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/news/antiwarprotest.htm>.

> accompanied by The Steve Bentley-Klein Quartet, Alan Rickman and John Sessions.[293]

The apparent focus on celebrity here is perhaps most usefully understood as a focus on a form of spectacle: that is, a desire to create an event which will attract the most attention, and with the involvement of established public figures, confer the most legitimacy.

However, within the wider action of the Lysistrata Project – outside of London, and the UK – a slightly different emphasis emerges. Describing the multiple readings of Lysistrata as "spearheads," the US-based organisers present an image of both individual units acting separately but also units which are part of a greater metaphorical army. The communal performance of the play is intended not only to raise the profile of the protest against the war on Iraq to an outside audience, but also to create a sense of participatory community which will lead to further action:

> Many of us are politically active today due to our participation in Lysistrata Project. We felt inspired by the palpable unity initiated by the readings, and the new friendships fostered there. Above all, Lysistrata Project participants discovered individual empowerment to speak out for what we believe.[294]

Though the mass reading of Lysistrata as mass protest can clearly be read as a political act – and an engagement with a public, political discourse – the event was designed to produce a very specific kind of effect: to voice and raise the profile of protest, and to foster a community in which further action could be taken. The Lysistrata Project did not directly, for example, advocate that those involved (men and women) follow the example of the women within Lysistrata and withhold sexual contact from partners and lovers who were in support of the war on Iraq.

The Lysistrata Project's strategy of public readings as protest might be seen to exhibit a similar performative emphasis as that active in certain generations of Pride events. However, in Pride, the strong emphasis on spectacle in events since the 1990s might be considered to have a replaced an earlier emphasis on a different form of

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[293] "Collateral Damage II," 14 Mar. 2003, The National Theatre, 19 May. 2005 <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=3919>.
[294] "What is Lysistrata Project?," The Lysistrata Project, 20 May. 2005 <http://www.lysistrataproject.com>.

activism. Where in early Pride events the march was a means to an end, later generations shifted to recognise that the march might comprise a desirable political end itself. The difference, then, is one between a march held to campaign on a specific issue and an event which constitutes a political end in itself. The *visibility* of the queer community is taken to serve the political needs of that community as, or more, successfully than a specific or direct campaign drive. Furthermore, that visibility does not have to be directly linked to a particular issue to remain effective.

The transition apparent in the organisation and performance of Pride expresses a change in political, or campaign, strategy – moving from an emphasis on direct activism to one of visibility. However, that transition is also marked by increased involvement of commercial interests, which have in turn informed the mode of that shift in emphasis. It is unclear, for example, whether the cost of Pride has risen because the number of people involved has risen – signalling a greater call for public activism – or because commercial interests have invested the time and money into the event that has produced a more spectacular event, which has in turn drawn greater numbers.

Though the rise of commercialism of Pride has contributed to a shift away from direct action, it cannot be said to have directly caused it. There is a sense, however, that commercial involvement presents some further levels on which a critique of Bakhtinian containment can be made. One of the ways in which such containment might manifest is in the apparent homogenisation of lesbian and gay culture, by which a potentially radical celebratory urge of the festival or carnival environment is expressed through very narrowly defined roles and images. Such an homogenisation of both desire and the gay niche market can be identified in the marketing practices of Gaydar (a popular gay internet dating site) as a major sponsor of Brighton Pride in 2004. Their branded presence on the day of the march involved stencilling the company logo and web address onto the chests of a group of men and women dressed in tight white shorts or thongs: all were muscular, tanned and tall. The bodies of the individual marchers become voluntary billboards by which the display of archetypal forms of desirability are associated with the brand name of the sponsor. Here, the visibility of those marchers confirms the presence of same-sex-desiring and

desired bodies (and hence the presence of that community) and binds that visibility to the promotion of a specific commercial interest.

Re-politicising Pride

Despite this problematic perspective, Brighton Pride has perhaps managed the successful transition from early direct action to later celebratory carnival by using the commercial structure of the event – a means of "legitimately" raising large amounts of money – to support political ends which are not directly part of the main and public sequence of Pride events. In September 2004, Brighton Pride was awarded charitable status and recently has been in such a position as to seek applications from local voluntary sector groups for grants. As such, the charity has been able to award grants ranging from £200 to £3,400 to a variety of local groups, such as B & H Disabled Dykes, Brighton Body Positive and Rainbow Families.[295] Brighton Pride's political activity is serviced by its activities as a commercialised venture, allowing action which is disparate from the site of the march but draws upon a similar emphasis on visibility – as in the staging of

> the "Great Debate," broadcast across the south-east by Southern Counties radio and involving leaders of the council, police and health authorities discussing issues relevant to the local LGBT community.[296]

The transformation of Pride into a performative action which is seen as somehow less radical may have produced a return to earlier forms of action, where the primacy of visibility conceal a functional, secondary aspect of an event designed to, for example, raise money for a specific campaign. If Pride cannot serve as a means of direct activism, it can be used to raise funds and provide the impetus for activism in other forms. The visibility of the fund-raising event enables a success that will pay for further action:

> Last year in May [Brighton Pride] promoted awareness of LGBT equality issues to the general public through a 10km fundraising walk through the centre of Brighton & Hove in conjunction with Stonewall, itself a registered charity. In conjunction with the local Health Authority and the Terrance

[295] "All About Pride," Pride in Brighton and Hove, 25 May. 2005 <http://www.brightonpride.org/all-about-pride/>.
[296] "All About Pride," <http://www.brightonpride.org/all-about-pride/>.

> Higgins Trust, raising awareness of health issues connected with alcohol and drug use by gay men through our website and a poster campaign.[297]

Similarly, London Pride has been marked by measures taken to reassert a political or activist presence for the event through a degree of disassociation or separation. After the march in 2004, there was a politically-oriented free festival in Trafalgar Square and a separate carnival festival – the "Big Gay Out," sponsored by the internet company Face Party – in Finsbury Park.

Yet despite this strategic recognition of the ends which Pride-as-carnival might serve or delimit, the call for a radical potential that has yet to be articulated persists. Peter Tatchell, writing once again in The Independent in 2002, suggested that the reformatting of the lesbian and gay movement as an expression of a lesbian and gay niche market is part of a pattern of wider social containment:

> The first Gay Pride march was organised by volunteer, grassroots activists. Today, more and more gay organisations are run by career campaigners. These sharp-suited middle-class professionals have infused the gay movement with their own cautious, respectable values. Craving acceptance and advancement, they rarely campaign on contentious issues, such as the hysteria over consensual sex between underage partners, the censorship of sexual imagery, the timidity of sex education lessons and the criminalisation of sex workers and sadomasochistic relationships. [...]
>
> The unwritten social contract at the heart of the Blairite project for gay law reform is that gay people should behave respectably. No more cruising, orgies or bondage. In return, the "good gays" will be rewarded with equal treatment.[298]

It is perhaps then appropriate that some queer performers and activists have sought to counter this implied, progressive social contract[299] with organised "bad behaviour."

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[297] "All About Pride," <http://www.brightonpride.org/all-about-pride/>.

[298] Peter Tatchell, "Gay Pride is now respectable, and the worse for it," The Independent 6 July 2002: 19.

[299] Cf. Anna Marie Smith, who argues that this contract predates the Blair Labour government and is a continuation of Thatcherite and New-Right politics; see "The Imaginary Inclusion of the Assimilable 'Good Homosexual': The British New Right's Representations of Sexuality and Race," Diacritics 24.2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1994).

Gay Shame

A San Francisco group called Gay Shame has emerged with an agenda that seeks to unravel a perceived political obeisance in the relationship between the queer community and traditional authority:

> GAY SHAME is a virus in the system. We are committed to a queer extravaganza that brings direct action to astounding levels of theatricality. We will not be satisfied with a commercialized gay identity that denies the intrinsic links between queer struggle and challenging power. We seek nothing less that a new queer activism that foregrounds race, class, gender and sexuality, to counter the self-serving values of gay consumerism and the increasingly hypocritical left. We are dedicated to fighting the rabid assimilationist monster with a devastating mobilization of queer brilliance. GAY SHAME is a celebration of resistance: ALL ARE WELCOME.[300]

Gay Shame's rhetoric creates an opposition between the struggle for traditional power for queer subjects and the interests of commerce-driven consumerism: commercial involvement in events such as Pride is therefore antithetic to any radical queer political movement.

In 2003, members of San Francisco Gay Shame were arrested after joining the city's Pride parade – apparently for threatening behaviour toward Gavin Newsom, the Republican city supervisor who was taking part in the event. Though the San Francisco Chronicle reported the behaviour as apparently unmotivated,[301] a local branch of the independent media outlet Indymedia reported that the activists had protested Newsom's "demonisation" of the homeless, claiming it exemplifyied the way in which the march ignored local social issues for the queer community.[302] While the exact sequence of events is unclear – the protestors were apparently arrested and held without charge for several days before being released – photographs and video of the event show a group marching under a banner reading "Queer Mutiny Not Consumer Unity." The demonstration within the parade, which

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[300] "Gay Shame: A Celebration of Resistance," Gay Shame 28 May. 2005 <http://www.gayshamesf.org/home.htm>.
[301] "No known motive for group's attack on Newsom at pride parade," 29 Jun. 2003, SFGate.com, 19 Apr. 2005 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/gate/archive/2003/06/29/gavin29.DTL>.
[302] "Queers Arrested for Joining the Gay Pride Parade," SF Bay Area IndyMedia, 29 Jun. 2002, 19 Apr. 2005 <http://www.indybay.org/archives/archive_by_id.php?id=1482&category_id=29>.

effectively used the event's perceived social neutrality as a framing device within which a specific counter-protest could be articulated, was partnered with the Gay Shame Awards.

Initiated in 2002 following a similar event in New York, the ceremony nominated groups and individuals whom the group claimed had "sold out" the queer community – including, in 2002, the organizers of the San Francisco Pride parade.[303] In 2003, the ceremony featured a burning effigy of Gavin Newsom for the ritualised distribution of his award. The use of the award ceremony format permitted a series of performative inversions: in reversing the traditional congratulatory or celebratory function of such an event, attention is also drawn to the function of the parade that forms its backdrop. The inward-looking dynamic of an awards ceremony that "rewards" members of its own community articulates the parade's own inversion, performed primarily to itself in celebration and congratulatory affirmation. Such inversion may, in turn, articulate the need for self-regarding critical address to a wider community or as a specific demand to "external" authority.

The actions of Gay Shame are perhaps purposefully disruptive, producing an excess in spectacle that is intended to trigger disgust as much as rapture. The burning in effigy of a demonised figure – its invocation of violent protest – might suggest a group which has lost faith in its ability to "move" audiences through conventional forms of communication, identified by John Orr[304] as an aspect of contemporary terrorism against the state in Richard E. Rubenstein's Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World.[305] Interestingly, Orr also notes Rubenstein's definition of terrorism as "acts of small-group violence for which arguable claims of mass representation can be made,"[306] a broad definition whose scope might be considered to point towards the threat of violence. Yet a clear distinction should be made between what Orr examines in terms of "theatrical terror," a "gruesome theatre

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[303] George Sanchez, "A Question of Pride," 28 Jun. 2002 Mother Jones, 15 Apr. 2005 <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2002/06/gay_shame.html>.
[304] John Orr, "Terrorism as Social Drama and Dramatic Form," Terrorism and Modern Drama, eds. John Orr and Dragan Klaic (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1990) 49.
[305] Richard E. Rubenstein, Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World (London: Taurus Books, 1987)
[306] Orr, quoting Rubenstein, 49.

of the unexpected whose performers are anonymous" that might involve the wounding, kneecapping, kidnap or assassination of public figures, and the deliberately theatricalised proceedings of Gay Shame. Gay Shame's choice of spectacle can be read as a comparatively "safe" festival action where an effigy is burnt rather than a person, confirmed by the containment of the effigy burning within the structure of the inverted awards ceremony. In the absence of actual violence perpetrated, the act seeks to raise the subject represented as a just figure of repellence and hatred – and seeks to form community around that polarising position. It is a radicalising gesture that identifies a singular figure as the source of key problems and argues that if "you are for him, you are against us." It is also an image designed to be carried beyond the site of the performance by journalists, photographers and other members of the wider community: as part of a deliberate performance, it is intentionally, rather than naively, inflammatory.

Nothing Succeeds Like Excess

The actions of Gay Shame suggest a strategy for evading a totalising critique of protest dramaturgy, of resisting a reading of Pride that sees methods of identification and display ultimately as functions of hegemonic containment. Gay Shame's performative techniques – staged within the context of "safe" or permissible expressions of gay culture – forgo the assumption that subversion can or will operate from somewhere "outside" of an existing system of cultural values. Instead, these techniques seek to produce a kind of performative excess that challenges hegemonic structures which seek to explain, contain, moderate and reproduce.

This notion of excess draws heavily on Peggy Phelan's introduction to Unmarked, where she argues:

> Representation follows two laws; it always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing. The "excess" meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant meanings possible.

> Despite this excess, representation produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly.[307]

It follows that the supplementary and multiple readings will not be exclusively progressive or radical. This position also recognises that the nature of representation of either context or identity might act on the part of hegemonic forces, seeking to deny or restrict progressive, radical or otherwise non-hegemonic representation. Furthermore, the representation of women by women (or lesbians by lesbians, or gay men by gay men etc.) may be seen to be subject to these terms; the "real" of women's experience in performance must always be a (strategic) simulation of that which it seeks to make present. However, recognition of this impasse drives attention away from a notion of secure representation or reproduction towards the excesses and ruptures those attempts produce.

How, then, is a recognition of excess to be considered functional? One answer can be found in Baudrillard's argument:

> [R]evolution must involve heterogeneous expression, wasteful gift exchange (pure expenditure rather than accumulation, final consumption rather productive consumption), and non-procreative sex.[308]

"Excess" (produced in the act of representation) is here understood as that which articulates a libido which cannot be diverted for socially useful performances; it is an excess produced in process of consumption. This should also be understood in contrast to the marketing of images or expropriation of styles which are "positive" or "tolerable" versions of a gay culture to a straight culture:

> Baudrillard notes that the status or identity-conferring quality of the commodity is not manufactured in the factory but rather in the consumption process. Thus it is control over consumptive rather than productive labor (through advertising or, less overtly, through cultural products like television programs rather than through time clocks and shop floor managers) that is important to the production of surplus value.[309]

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[307] Phelan, Unmarked: the politics of performance 2.
[308] Miranda Joseph, "The Performance of Production and Consumption," Social Text 54 (Spring 1998): 51.
[309] Joseph 34.

The mode in which the terms of one's own existence might be liberated shifts here, away from the site of labour – and from a once functional allegiance to a working class community – to the site of consumption: the gay-friendly advert on television, and the reproducible spectacle of the parade.

The initial potential of Pride (and the resistance of a later homogenised Pride by Gay Shame) might then be found in its capacity to generate a surplus, an excess – representation that resists commodification because it does not have a socially (or rather economically) useful function. As such, it may present a means of representing the bind of queer visibility in a "commodity culture":

> In her analysis of the commodification of lesbians, Danae Clark has observed that the intensified marketing of lesbian images is less indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality than of capitalism's appropriation of gay "styles" for mainstream audiences. Visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects.[310]

Gay Shame's mode of "excessive performance," then, might be understood as that which disrupts the normalising processes of "gay consumption," processes which attempt to overwrite a claim to social legitimacy that is not marked by commodification. The actions of Gay Shame are directed at a flawed claim to cultural legitimacy for non-heterosexual subjects; or rather, their actions resist the form of social legitimacy that is defined by the patterns of "useful consumption" of the official Pride events.

The struggle over Pride's definition may persist as a trace of its collectivist origins. Though the contemporary celebration of Pride may appear removed from earlier models of the civil rights protest march or the Stonewall memorial, searching for a specific historical trace or continuity may be erroneous. While the professional organisation of Pride might suggest the ordering of the event as an end in itself, a reading of the relationship between particular political ends and particular

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[310] Rosemary Hennessey, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," Cultural Critique 29 (Winter 1994-5): 32.

performative forms presents the argument for Pride as the manifestation of a complex negotiations of legitimacy, personal identity and collective action. Movements to redefine or otherwise revolutionise Pride – though sometimes staged against a backdrop of "institutionalisation" – might then be best understood as the key participants in a continual process, rather than external actors involved in some form of meta-performance. Pride's performance does not merely define a queer community for a straight world, but also produces, reproduces and revises queer identity to its participants: in other words, to itself.

Roy — Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Gay. Homosexual. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that.

(Millennium Approaches, 1.9)

Lin — Don't turn it into a lecture, Vicky, it's meant to be an orgy.

Victoria — It never hurts to understand the theoretical background. You can't separate fucking and economics.

(Cloud Nine, 2.3)

Queer theory's usefulness to theatre history goes beyond claiming a challenge to traditional models of representation and identity. Drawing on both feminist and psychoanalytic criticism to defy a separation, expressed in the coarsest sense, of "fucking and economics," queer theory recognises – and challenges – the cultural compartmentalisation of discourses that are formative of subjectivity. In tracing how such seemingly disparate discourses form an interrelating system of representation, queer theory provides important tools for understanding the circulation and production of power – and, most significantly of all, the nature of performative subjectification.

One of the aims of this project has been to take the notion of a queer subjectivity beyond the unknown or the unmarked, to shift from the notion of a subject merely marked by persistent evasiveness (by terms that do not "mean what they seem to mean") to an understanding of queer as a critical process. The acknowledgement of queer-as-process has depended, therefore, on a reading of identity and subjectivity as the product of performative discourses. Beginning in a critique of essentialist models of identity – drawn from self-identical male/masculine and female/feminine bodies – this project has sought to describe alternative models for subjectivity. Such alternatives have recognised a separation between "material" and "cultural"

discourses with the intention of challenging such a binary. Central to that attempt has been a pursuit of Judith Butler's proposal of a culturally materialised body: that is, a material presence articulated or made sensible through cultural discourse. However, though the theoretical underpinning of this project has drawn heavily upon psychoanalytic criticism – particularly Elizabeth Grosz' reading of Lacan's symbolic – it has not done so with the intention of merely enforcing a straightforward primacy of language. Instead, the theory of performativity outlined here has sought to recognise that cultural (symbolic, linguistic) discourses are predicated on a material presence. Through the work of Butler and Lacanian theory (from which Butler herself draws), this thesis has argued that the persistence of that materiality and the threat to its continuity forms the basis for individuation and subjectivity.

Crucially, that theoretical speculation has been made accessible through a selective history of British performance and performance convention, recognising where groups and individuals have sought out particular methods to serve specific social and political agendas. Though that discussion has occasionally assessed productions and performance conventions in the terms of "success" or effectiveness, that dialogue has emerged from the concerns of the companies and groups under consideration – as in Gay Sweatshop's self-identified bind between good theatre and good politics, and in the criteria for a "successful" Pride articulated by members of the Manchester gay business community. As such, the recognition of such concerns was not intended to reinforce or create criteria for "good" queer activism, but rather to situate such considerations within the critical and cultural narratives which produce them.

Though this project has primarily focussed on British performance, the inclusion of American work has been a deliberate choice. Part of that decision has been a resistance to a potentially arbitrary exclusion of work which has a direct relation to the development of British performance practices, or might otherwise enrich and extend this discussion. The development of British performance in the late twentieth century has not occurred in a cultural vacuum; as this thesis has indicated, the changes in political activity in the UK (both in the sense of methods and choice of

issues) has reflected wider trends toward collectivism and visibility. In particular, Tony Kushner's work draws upon a European and sometimes specifically British heritage of theatre practice and critical theory – on one level through recognition of the work of Caryl Churchill and on another through an involvement with explicitly Brechtian methodologies. In that sense, Kushner's Angels in America – "A Gay Fantasia on National Themes" can be understood as a reflection of Churchill's involvement with a British, imperial history. Similarly, the criticism of Pride in the UK voiced by Peter Tatchell and others – and their attempts to recuperate a political space within such spectacle – is echoed in the performative strategies of San Francisco's Gay Shame. Though markedly different in context and choice of activism, both draw upon a similar critical discomfort with a seemingly limited social contract which rewards the "good behaviour" of safe, socially appropriate queer subjects.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, this thesis' attempt to sketch out the possibilities of a performative model of subjectivity has been purposefully non-canonical. Rather than producing a list of firm criteria or qualities which are the "essence" of queer, the choice of texts, performances and events within this project has sought the recognition and analysis of the possible outcomes of a "queering" discourse. The claim to queer performativity in this discussion is not marked by a choice of a limited or specific range of performance conventions, but rather by an awareness of the discourses in which such conventions operate – and, crucially, the manner in which such conventions are reflexively involved in the construction of those discourses. This approach allows the recognition of both potential benefits and possible limitations of particular theoretical approaches – not with the intention of building a pecking order of performative viability, but instead suggesting the kind of complex negotiations that might take place in the construction of queer performance.

Similarly, discussion of potentially radical theatricalities has sought to avoid the implication that the theoretical dissection of such attempts involves the occupation of an elevated critical space, a methodology that is somehow unmarked by the cultural products and history that it seeks to analyse. As such, this project has attempted to

show that ideological commitments and decisions operate within pragmatic circumstance, that the "free" choice of performative activity takes place within specific cultural environments. The selection of casts, scripts, venues and performance convention – as well as the putative audience for which a performance might be designed or marketed – all represent choices, but not necessarily *free* choices from an unlimited continuum of possibilities. The critical discussion of a symbolic or theoretical framework has in turn been informed by material realities which, while might pass as unmarked, are not without consequence.

Camp and Conditional Representation

Though camp has been presented as a mode which can destabilise transparent and normative relationships between sex, gender and sexuality, that destabilisation requires a continuous re-invocation of that which it challenges. This structural criticism has been dependent on a reading of camp as a form of parody, a performativity marked by similarity to and difference from existing, recognisable cultural forms. The manifestation of a camp subject as a feminised form of masculinity, for example, is dependent upon a cultural vocabulary of appearance and expectation: of that which passes for male masculinity and, crucially, that which falls short of or threatens that domain.

Round the Horne's use of parody is in part deliberately transparent, invoking cultural narratives and situations which are broadly recognisable for the purposes of inversion or distortion – always retaining the trace of that original form within the parody. Round the Horne's use of polari might then present an apparent contradiction to the reflexivity of parody, seeding commonly accessible forms with private language carrying specific connotations of sexual identity. As previously indicated, the use and recognition of polari might denote access to an unmarked community of similar subjects, a form of "coming out" that does not involve a disavowal of the closet or declaration of sexual identity within a public sphere. Yet, in its characterisation by Paul Baker as an "anti-language," polari presents a linguistic model that strongly resembles the structure of parody: a counter-cultural form which operates as a

conscious alternative to a dominant culture from within that same dominant culture. Polari's practice of "relexicalising" – introducing new vocabulary within an existing grammar – might further illustrate camp's parodic function. Camp as parody does not replace existing cultural forms – but distorts, enlarges, re-combines and exaggerates cultural imagery that already exists:

> it originates in an upsetting of the balance, or a disjoining of the fusion, between the form and content of the original and thus focuses upon the familiar duality of form and content lying at the center of most inquiries into the aesthetic perception of itself [...]. [I]n so doing, it raises the question of what the relation is between form and content and forces us to become aware of the manner in which we experience a work of art as a fusion of form and content. The problem can be stated in another way: a parody forces us to be aware of form as an artifice or as an artificial discipline [...].[311]

Such devotion suggests several additional specific qualities of camp as parody. In order for camp performance to be registered as disruptive, it must be staged within an environment of presumed stability – a uniformity in the distribution of signifiers of sex, gender and sexuality within which the revelation of instability and variety can be staged. Correspondingly, the interruption of social norms is only possible through the retention of the process by which it emerges: the register of similarity and difference is not pregiven but must be produced and re-produced.

This sense of recuperative participation has been presented as an apparent impasse in any attempt to claim and subvert existing cultural images. One central concern is that such an attempted recuperation might not address the underlying circumstances which produce and circulate certain, pervasive imagery. Instead, to take up, reproduce and parody particular images and subjects involves a form of foreclosure whereby the "original" forms persist, per Butler, as a kind of defining negativity. To extend that recursive awareness still further, a critique of those images also participates in their continued circulation, through an assumption or acknowledgement of their cultural saturation. By identifying certain images or

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[311] G. D. Kiremidjian, "The Aesthetics of Parody," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 28.2 (Winter 1969): 233.

constructions of subjectivity as fitting for parody, the status of those images and subjectivities as culturally or politically significant is reiterated.

Yet rather than merely describing tighter and tighter circles of introspection, recognition of that circulatory relationship permits a closer understanding of repression. Parody does merely a present a fixed, if distorted, mirror image of its subject but acts upon itself:

> The self-reflexivity of parody [...] guarantees both a critical and creative dimension to this form. The parody not only rewrites another work, but suggests yet another one within itself, reminding the reader of the relativism of any work of art, and also of the richness of creative possibilities of an allegedly limited single source.[312]

This recognition of creative flexibility strengthens a reading of parody as a form of performance that extends beyond comic mimicry, and suggests the manner in which seemingly stable signifiers of identity can be meaningfully re-ordered.

Consequently, oppression manifests through a rigid interpretation or ordering of such signifiers: combinations of sex, gender and sexuality which are permissible because they pass as "original." Though the repression of non-heterosexual identities might involve the privileging of such forms, those forms do not describe the underlying relationships of power; they are, rather, a product of those relationships. This allows the further recognition that normative images of masculinity and femininity are not forms of the Real co-opted to serve a particular agenda: the claim that those images represent the Real at all may be understood as their first unmarked function, a function which reflexively conceals the constructedness of those images. Camp's interaction with stereotypical figurings of this supposed Real lead us to a Foucauldian argument that:

> repression does not act on a pregiven field of pleasure and desire; it constitutes that field as that which is to be regulated, that which is potentially

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[312] Michele Hannoosh, "The Reflexive Function of Parody," Comparative Literature 41.2 (Spring 1989): 117.

> or actually under the rubric of regulation. The repressive regime, as Foucault calls it, requires its own self-augmentation and proliferation.[313]

Rather than foreclosing camp as a performativity unable to reach a supposedly radical potential, this awareness directs critical attention to the processes of subjectification rather than to specific subject states. As such, camp offers the critical opportunity to recognise that relationships of desire are performed: neither "natural" nor essential but instead a product of selective discourse.

Gay Sweatshop

This challenge to an uncritical acceptance of pregiven constituencies and "authentic" representation raises certain questions for the staging of queer lives. It could be argued that such staging suffers from a form of reflexivity which misplaces the source of a claim on legitimacy, even as that claim is made. The corrective agenda of Gay Sweatshop – seeking to confront and re-write the narrow narratives and images of gay and lesbian subjectivity available in mainstream entertainment – could be read as limited by the absence of an "outside" perspective that speaks from the position of the Real from which those new forms might be constructed. Furthermore, the invocation of existing subjects prior to the formulation of alternative subjectivities is not incidental, but rather a conditional element of that process:

> The story by which subjection is told is, inevitably, circular, presupposing the very subject for which it seeks to give an account. On the one hand, the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking a third-person perspective on itself, that is, by dispossessing its own perspectives in the act of narrating its genesis. On the other hand, the narration of how the subject is constituted presupposes that the constitution has already taken place, and thus arrives after the fact. The subject loses itself to tell the story of itself, but in telling the story of itself seeks to give an account of what the narrative function has already made plain.[314]

Gay Sweatshop's commitment to gay performers playing gay-authored, produced and directed roles can then be understood as an attempt to circumvent this reflexivity

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[313] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 58.
[314] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 11.

by internalising its processes. The narration of alternative, legitimate gay lives involves the invocation of subjectivities which are already being lived; the third person narration of genesis is performed by those whose constitution is guaranteed by the possibility of that very performance.

As previously suggested, this process does involve an intentional temporal discontinuity in the repeated staging of "coming out," where – as in Mister X - gay performers re-assume the closet so that it might be cast off, a flexibility that is dependent both upon the closet as a presumptive and pervasive state and, contradictorily, upon the (unmarked) capacity of the performer to invoke and disperse that closet. This cycle of mastery over and subjection to the closet evokes Butler's notion that "[t]o desire the conditions of one's own subordination is [...] required to persist as oneself."[315]

The quality of that persistence is not marked by specific outcomes – that is, the adoption of certain categories of sex or sexuality – but by the agency by which such outcomes are achieved. The staging of "coming out" is valuable because it directs critical attention beyond the actions of a specific performer to the forms of political and social agency that might be accessed through "coming out." For the representation of lesbian and gay subjects to have an impact beyond a liminal theatre space – to follow Gay Sweatshop's commitment to "working some change" in their audience – the theatrical performative strategies must be transferable and reproduceable. There is here, then, an argument for the necessity of staging "coming out" as a quoteable gestic act, rather than primarily as a narrative of individual identity.

However, that focus on self-identification remains an important element of "coming out." A capacity to take on or cast off sexual identities – to closet and out oneself – can be understood to describe an underlying cyclical dynamic of self-determination, whereby the renunciation of self is understood as the origin of the subject:

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[315] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 9.

> The renunciation of the self as the origin of its own actions must be performed repeatedly and can never finally be achieved, if only because the *demonstration* of renunciation itself is a self-willed action. This self-willed action thus rhetorically confounds precisely what it is supposed to show.[316]

Given that this process is not so much unavoidable as a necessary precondition of agency, a critical treatment of "coming out" shifts from the valorisation of being "out" to recognising a permeable border between "in" and "out." More specifically, Butler's argument that subordination makes possible the assumption of power ("where resistance is *really* a recuperation of power and recuperation is *really* a resistance"[317]) describes the conditions in which the recognition of a liminal position between "in" and "out" holds particular significance.

That recognition is not intended as an argument for the straightforward desirability of occupying such a relationship to normative subject states, but instead seeks an understanding of how the emergence of such a position may be the product of a claim on stable constituencies. What limits are placed on a radical or revolutionary re-ordering of the subject if it still defers to a hetero/homo binary as the primary means of determining difference? The limit of "coming out" as a performative, political act may be the degree to which it misreads fixity as a quality of difference and, in turn, that fixity as a form of homogeneity.

In response (or perhaps resistance) to that impulse, the portrayal of "coming out" has been shown frequently coupled with the use of culturally located narratives which make specific the multiple social and psychic demands that are formative of identity:

> Self identity, at the heart of which is sexual identity, is not something that is given as a result of the continuities of an individual's life or the fixity and force of his or her desires. It is something that has to be worked on, invented and reinvented in accord with the changing rhythms, demands, opportunities, and closures of a complex world; it depends on the effectiveness of the biographical narratives we construct for ourselves in a turbulent world, on our ability to keep a particular narrative going.[318]

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[316] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 49. Emphasis original.
[317] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 13.
[318] Jeffrey Weeks, "The Paradoxes Of Identity," The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance, eds. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (London, New York: Routledge, 2000) 164.

The queer realisation of the "constructedness" of biographical narratives is not restricted to non-heterosexual identities, or even identities which are primarily sexual. Rather, the system of "changing rhythms, demands, opportunities, and closures" cuts across all discourse; it is an unmarked osmosis of difference which permits all claims to distinctive categories of subjectivity.

Bodily Persistence

Such a recognition of fluid boundaries between identifications and particular subject states might instate a problematic and simplistic notion of "identity as performance." In response, it becomes necessary to resist a supposed opposition of fluid and permanent subjects, of movement from a traditional reading of an orthodox subject (who is whole, stable, essential) to the construction of a new, universal and post-modern queer subjectivity (that is borderless, fluid and constructed). Consequently, the theatre arising from the advent of AIDS has offered a means to go beyond this tentative partitioning of subjectivities and to reassert the consequences of a material body.

Kushner's invocation of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History positions AIDS at the "end of history," not in the sense of apocalyptic closure but in a revelation that the illusion of forward movement conceals a chronic, unmoving persistence. "Progress" is merely the rubble-heap of that which has come before, growing higher and higher. This challenge to "progress" also expresses a frustration with the limits of tolerance, a failure in seemingly liberal narratives of humanitarian concern to extend assistance to those infected with HIV/AIDS. AIDS begins to describe the circumstances in which transgressions of the body are seemingly unrecuperable:

> As for the rhetoric of transgression, so far as it occurs within the repressively tolerant structures of late bourgeois capitalism, it's hard to say just how far it wants to go with the body in the gratification of desire, nor in what conceivable political space. [319]

[319] Herbert Blau, "The Surpassing Body," TDR 35.2 (Summer 1991): 78.

The AIDS marked body presents as the limit of the tolerance, a body which cannot be conceived of within that political space and yet demands recognition. Rather than rendering AIDS marked bodies as beyond assistance, corpses which enjoy accidental and temporary volition, Kushner's challenge to "progress" describes persistence of the will to live, despite even the discovery of "how deep the hatred goes."[320]

Though the AIDS-marked subject is transgressive – and should form part of the rubble-heap of history – it persists, testing the border of cultural precedent:

> [A]s we theorize once more – in a pluralistic society with multiple agonistic and maybe repugnant desires (e.g. the pornographic) – the prospect of a liveable public sphere, the unavoidable question remains as to the allowable energy flows or, with the remedial breaks and tears in the body politic, the threshold of legitimacy of the formerly repressed.[321]

This threshold of legitimacy marks the limit of the usefulness of tolerance; it is the point at which the wilful persistence of the body becomes irreconcilable to the demands of the public sphere. Though the AIDS-marked subject might be denoted "unallowable," his or her continuing presence does not mark a departure from the body politic. That persistence is an excess which – while it might exceed the threshold of legitimacy – is produced by that very body:

> In Foucault, the suppression of the body not only requires and produces the very body it seeks to suppress, it goes further by extending the bodily domain to be regulated, proliferating sites of control, discipline, and suppression.[322]

In this sense, Ron Athey's literal, AIDS-marked body is staged within existing cultural fantasies of the body. By ritualising his own body – primarily through religious iconography which celebrates sacrifice and pain as sacred – Athey challenges the primacy of a "productive" (allowable and legitimate) body. This recognition of excess, reproduced within the sphere of normative representation, is

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[320] Jones 20.
[321] Blau 78.
[322] Butler, The Psychic Life of Power 59.

partly dependent on a convention of live performance where (instead of summoning a theatrical surrogate) Athey's body stands in for itself:

> Without a copy, live performance plunges unto visibility – in a maniacally charged present - and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control. Thus, even more radically than photography, performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends.[323]

Though markedly different in choice of convention and political methodology, both Kushner and Athey's works present the argument that there is no escape from the material body, that (following Lacan) although the Real might only be accessible through the symbolic it persists as a discursive, historical force. In that sense, AIDS marks the moment at which the body begins to "write back" from within the symbolic structure that had claimed it unreadable:

> We have come to think of the spectacle as a desensitizing perception and dematerializing the real, but to the degree that a mutilated body, a finger, a hand, a head, is felt through the mediascape as something more than fantasy, not mere simulation, it may sustain a view of history as hysteria, as in the cannibalistic text of Hamletmachine: "Somewhere bodies are torn apart so I can dwell in my shit. Somewhere bodies are open so I can be alone with my blood. My thoughts are lesions in my brain."[324]

Mutilation and dismemberment – which should mark the fragmentation of the self – provides the means by which a sensitivity of the bodily, of the Real, might be reclaimed. That the pursuit of the Real, whole body might be impossible does not mean that the material body is wholly untenable. Instead, it may indicate how the forms of that fantasy of wholeness and legitimacy may be precariously "un-Real." Kushner and Athey's performative responses to the AIDS crisis begin to make clear the mutilated body which passes for whole, or – more specifically – the cultural mechanisms which operate to render certain subjects healthy, legitimate and historical and others irretrievably marginal, disordered and unrepresentable.

Unmarked

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[323] Peggy Phelan, "Money Talks, Again," TDR 35.3 (Autumn 1991): 133.
[324] Blau 81.

This thesis' assertion that a queer critical approach demands a rejection of uniformity has involved a recognition of the specific discursive circumstances in which subjects are marked as legitimate or illegitimate, or rendered recognisable at all. This sensitivity is primed by the realisation that a rejection of pregiven constituencies and an argument for the discursive construction of subjectivity might imply that all subjects are prey to the same systems of signification: in other words, that all subjects are put together in the same way through similar registers of difference.

Resistance to this potential and inadvertent normalisation of difference has been articulated through a regard for the manner in which marginal subjectivities are an expression of persistent cultural fantasies which, in turn, denote legitimate subjectivities. To that end, Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock's work in Cloud Nine has illustrated how narratives of Empire might construct the racially marked Other. That Other's markedness becomes part of the determination of "whiteness" as unmarked.

This unmarked quality of whiteness can be understood as an apparent disappearance of the material grounds for such a subject, while in contrast,

> for the black subject to pass as white, the corporeal gets in the way, pronounces theatrically the distance between the identification and the identity. Whereas for the white man, "passing" is possible precisely because of the invisibility of the white body; the fantasy is achieved because the materiality of the corporeal body is not pronounced socio-culturally. Thus, fantasy dissimulates materiality for certain subject categories, whilst foregrounding it for others.[325]

The corporal body of the white subject does not announce itself because it passes as the norm from which difference emerges. Cloud Nine might appear to resist this dissimulation of white corporeal subjects through the meaningful absence of black subjects. In place of an "irretrievably corporeal" black subject (who cannot "pass" for anything other than itself) is found a focus on the barely concealed desires of

[325] Harbord 176-7.

white bodies, desires which cross the boundaries of gender, marriage and sexuality which, in turn, might mark those bodies as normative.

In this context, the colonial manipulation of racial identity emerges as a means of policing – or perhaps only concealing – those desires. Joshua's role as the black boy who would be white (performed by an adult, white actor) suggests how a colonial project of civilisation acts to re-establish divisions of legitimacy and markedness. The promise of (colonial) assimilation

> relies upon the genetic reproduction of whiteness and the cultural reproduction of the values of Anglo-Saxons within a genetically illogical racial system requiring that racial identity be reduced essentially to a white/not-white binary, allowing the maintenance of a white center with not-white margins [...] The center exploits the energy of the margin, augmenting and renewing itself as the racially ambiguous are drawn to the self-validating power of the center to define itself as white and therefore pure, authentic, and "naturally" dominant.[326]

The construction and participation of not-white subjects becomes a means of recuperation for white subjects, a method of "shoring up" and providing symbolic closure for whiteness:

> Just as the white-skinned African-American becomes white through a process of silencing and suppression, by denying, "forgetting," ignoring, or erasing evidence of African ancestry, so does the "pure white" family constitute itself by denying kinship with its non-white members, as the racially diverse nation claims a white European identity by marginalizing its non-European heritages.[327]

Here, queer theory offers the means to acknowledge a structural problem in dominant culture: that the recognition of marginal subjects involves, as with parody, an invocation of an "original" subject who occupies a central position of legitimacy. Yet this recognition need not define marginal subjects as limited series of mirror-oppositions to that centre. Instead, an awareness of subjectivity as the product of

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[326] Harryette Mullen, "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness," Diacritics 24.2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 73-4.
[327] Mullen 72.

discourse rather than as pregiven constituency allows a recognition that the pervasiveness of specific fantasies need not indicate absolute mastery, where

> [d]enied a subject speaking position, the subaltern is relegated to unknowable real outside Western language and representation, remaining, in Lacan's parlance, inaccessible and unrepresentable.[328]

To accept such subjects as unknowable is to attribute, without critical challenge, a uniformly consistent and persistent success to the discursive processes by which those subjects are rendered "outside" of knowledge. Such a reading is belied by the systems of iteration and re-iteration by which the facade of permanence is constructed: those systems are not the detritus of independent success and permanence, but rather suggest that presumptively legitimate subjects must seek continual proof of that legitimacy.

The accessibility and representability of legitimate subjects is not pregiven; it must be enacted and re-enacted. In turn, that logic recognises that marginal subjects do not occupy fixed positions in relation to the centre – the relationship of margin to centre must also be continually enacted. Crucially, this project has attempted to show that such re-enactment of subjectivity is non-identical, or heterogeneous, in its process: all difference is not the same kind of difference, any more than all subjects which "pass" are identical.

In part, this supposition has informed a relationship between postcolonial, feminist and queer theories that might avoid Sara Suleri's fear of a reductive coalition in which "each term serves to reify the potential pietism of the other."[329] Such a relationship demands a distinction between registers of difference and the semantics of opposition: no longer "I am different from, therefore I am opposed to," but instead a sense of the possibilities of co-operation. This knowledge also admits that affiliation, though potentially transformative and permitting the occupation of

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[328] Jan Campbell, Arguing With The Phallus: Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial Theory (London, New York: Zed Books, 2000) 193.
[329] Sara Suleri, qtd in Lee Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) 84.

privileged subject positions, does not offer complete determination. It also offers a more sophisticated understanding of political pragmatism at work in the activist relationship between, for example, the mining unions and LGSM during the 1984-5 strike action.

Jill Dolan's discussion of Cathy Cohen's assessment of such productive, functional relationships further addresses this recognition of non-identical affiliation:

> Rather than demonizing heterosexuality as the antithesis of queer, she [Cathy Cohen] said that a gay and lesbian political movement has to theorize heteronormativity as a structural problem in dominant culture. Heteronormativity marginalizes African-American welfare mothers, by her example, in ways similar to how it marginalizes white lesbians, by moralizing against the inappropriate performance of their sexuality. This theorizing allows lesbians – white and of color – and welfare mothers – white and of color – to build a coalitional politics based on their similar experience of oppressive social structures, rather than on the basis of neatly mirrored, shared identities.[330]

This notion of coalitional politics might allow a resistance of a "cult" of "oppositional criticism," where the value of the marginal "inheres only in its capacity to politicise – or predictably – 'subvert' major, that is to say, more developed cultural formations."[331]

There is here an indication of how a coalitional politics might relate to the demand for collectivism – that is, for individuals to "come out" as gay or lesbian. While a shared collective identity might be "necessary for the mobilization of *any* social movement, including the classic labour movement," that strain of collectivism should not be read simply as the production of homogeneity:

> identity can be a goal of social movement activism, either giving acceptance for a hitherto stigmatized identity or deconstructing categories of identities such as "man," "woman," "gay," "straight," [...] "black," or white."[332]

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[330] Jill Dolan, "Producing Knowledges That Matter: Practicing Performance Studies Through Theatre Studies," TDR 40.4 (Winter 1996): 15.
[331] Gandhi 84.
[332] Bernstein 535. Emphasis original.

The capacity for different groups to come together on the basis of shared experience of structural oppression or discrimination also contains within it a challenge to the terms of oppression on the grounds of that marginality. It is not merely expressive of identity but of the political and social structures which inform the potential of that identity.

The Conditions of Marginality

The difficulties of negotiating that shared experience of marginality are apparent in Posener, Kay and Wandor's theatrical treatment of lesbian identity. While recognition of the structures which reflexively denote untenable or "impossible" subject positions informs our understanding of marginality, there remains the necessity of recognising the specific consequences to subjects who are not or cannot be rendered culturally comprehensible.

As such, it is crucial to comprehend that the margins on which lesbian identities operate – on which they are constructed – are the product of specific hierarchies and genealogies of gender which are not mirrored in the construction of gay male identity. Amongst the texts of lesbian theatre within this project, Care and Control perhaps most explicitly articulates how identification as lesbian, or merely as a woman who has rejected the heterosexual obligations of her marriage, can act to reveal and disrupt a system of interacting social expectations.

That system of expectations is marked by a sequence of roles-as-identities determined by relationships to a male partner: sexuality determined by a capacity (exercised or not) to have children; obeisance to existing social patterns and expectations regarding the "normal" upbringing of children, including the "nuclear family"; the expectation of maternalism, or the specific demands of a woman as a reproductive (and therefore presumptively heterosexual) mother. That system is bordered by an absence of similar essentialisms associated with paternalism or male responsibility to the family and the concurrent unevenness of roles as care-givers. Most significantly, Care and Control describes the intercession of legal authorities to

both confirm the primary cultural responsibilities of a mother and punish a woman for not fulfilling them – thus indicating the limited combination of sexual and social roles that can successfully pass for mother.

The conflicts of lesbian identity with other roles denoted as female/feminine are not pregiven but the result of existing, competing expectations. Though Any Woman Can might connect the viability of a lesbian identity with its visibility – with "coming out" – Care and Control articulates the existing territory within which such lesbian identity might be policed – and in a very literal sense, *judged* incompatible with existing social obligations.

This refusal of unproblematic narratives of "coming out" is significant – because it offers a recognition of the complex social locations which determine the consequences of such action. "Coming out" is not presented as a straightforwardly emancipatory process of self-identification, but one which articulates alternative and *yet still conditional* subject states. The means of identification made available through performance do not merely operate to secure an identity for an individual; they also offer the potential to challenge the discourses which mark that identity as marginal. In this sense, the performative staging of lesbian identities suggests a reading of identification practices as a response to marginalisation that challenges the machinery of marginalisation: that reveals the limited terms on which even a marginal identity can be claimed – that is, in response to and in the context of existing normative expectations.

The claim on social identities cannot be described as wholly liberational. Though the resistance of stereotypical and derogatory renderings of gay, lesbian and other non-heterosexual identities permits positive claims on self-identity and legitimacy, the process of recuperation constructs new relationships and new social expectations. It is perhaps incumbent upon those involved in such processes – either theoretically or in active community politics – to recognise where the boundaries of marginality have not been destroyed but repositioned.

To this end, the recognition of the specific discourses – racial, sexual, material – which inform our sense of difference can offer an alternative to

> a neoliberal politics of normalisation that, although it too deploys "sameness" with heterosexuals as a central aspect of its argument, differs in emphasising the rights of individuals rather than "gay rights" and in seeking "equality" with, rather than tolerance from, the mainstream.[333]

Here, the claim on difference – and a recognition of the specific cultural and historical conditions which produce that differentiation[334] – is lost in a seemingly emancipatory claim of "sameness:"

> In effect, sameness emerges from difference through two mechanisms: first through the appeal to a universal lesbian and gay citizen who deserves equal rights with heterosexuals; and second through the dominant interpretation of equality as similitude, in this case between lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals. To the extent that lesbian and gay communities are socially heterogeneous, an obvious problem with this approach is that *differences and the complex social locations within that group membership are obscured and inequalities such as those of gender, class, race and disability are not addressed.*[335]

Where the earliest forms of Pride addressed the legal and social institutions which might have informed those locations, later variations appear to make an uncomplicated claim on public solidarity that avoids directly political activity. In that respect, it might be said that a collective demonstration of solidarity has become a collective demonstration of the gay community's capacity for non-threatening homogeneity, as disparities within the group membership are minimised and divergent demands are disparaged as counterproductive factionalism. Pride's dominance in the media's treatment of lesbian and gay activism has, at least, acted to conceal the work and lives of those who cannot or will not participate in Pride. Where a reluctance to take part in Pride in the past might have described a resistance to publicly identify with (or as supportive of) non-heterosexual subjects – a

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[333] Richardson 516.
[334] Cf. David Halperin's emphasis on "the multiplicity of possible historical connections between sex and identity." See "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities and the History of Sexuality," Representations 63 (Summer 1998): 108-9.
[335] Richardson 520. Emphasis added.

reluctance to "come out" – contemporary resistance to Pride may now stem from its perceived inefficacy in representing such subjects and advancing their interests.

Pride's apparent transition from protest march to carnival celebration describes part of this development, insofar as carnival activity has come to operate as form of respectable difference which is legitimate because it emerges from the assumption of similitude: I have as much right to party as you do. Though the forms of celebration might not be "normative," their legitimacy is based on a claim to equal rights that emphasises sameness over difference. Consequently, "the emphasis on shared norms and inclusivity raises difficulties in relation to what constructions of lesbians and gay men are mobilised in order to establish the case for equality."[336]

Furthermore, the coalescence of Pride's activities around certain social niches – either in the growing preference for specific community venues rather than neutral (or potentially hostile) public spaces or in the reproduction of homogenous body forms (the carnival queen in Rio feathers, regardless of the distance from Rio) – describes the creation of new territories and margins to social recognition. Similarly, the involvement of professional organisers in Pride has led to the development of an activism that emphasises the financial management of large scale events: the capacity of the community to organise, police and finance itself has become proof of the original claim on legitimacy:

> Lesbians and gay men were previously constrained by representations of themselves as mad, bad or sad; now they are being shaped through normative constructions of responsible and respectable sexual citizenship. Constructions that are structured through the processes of neoliberal self-regulatory governance, central to which is professionalisation and particular forms of knowledge construction.[337]

This social contract of responsibility and respectability is self-regulating, whereby the potentially disruptive activities of carnival are acceptable because they are well organised; that is, their disruptive qualities are maintained and tempered by the

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[336] Richardson 520.
[337] Richardson 523.

performers involved in constructing the spectacle, who are in turn invested in reproducing themselves as legitimate citizens.

In that context, the work of Gay Shame can be understood as an intentionally discordant theatricality that resists such a contract – resists the regulatory demands of assuming legitimately marginal identities. The response to a perceived homogenisation of a directly political, activist Pride is characterised by deliberate, functional excess that tests the borders of the respectable spectacle. The desire to shock and disrupt – either through protests staged within the march, or counter-community awards given for betraying the interests of that community – suggests a resistance toward accepting normative self-regulation as a condition of social legitimacy. Here, the claim on the socially disruptive and obscene emerges as a response to legitimacy-as-normativity. Though changes in law and public attitudes might allow a public non-heterosexual identity to enjoy a far greater degree of legitimacy and respectability, that social mobility is not without borders. Echoing Peter Tatchell's notion of a social contract of "good behaviour," a refusal of the offer to pass as normal recognises that such identification would involve the internalisation of regulation.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, Gay Shame's work involves the willing self-identification with obscenity – rather than imposition of that value judgement – as a means of circumventing the processes of regulation:

> While it is true that all cultures regulate sexuality, it is surely true that none has legislated more harshly than ours. Obscenity is a reaction against that cruel legislation. The goal of obscenity is to disarm, expose, and then enjoy what is prohibited. If a hostile joke tears down authority, an obscene joke goes directly to what authority keeps for itself and enjoys it. The structure of joking is a masterpiece of maneuver. Obstacles are not overcome but circumvented.[338]

Here, the rhetoric of seeking legitimacy through official recognition gives way to the possibility of claiming the position of power that commands such recognition, if only

[338] Richard Schechner, "Speculations on Radicalism, Sexuality & Performance," TDR 13.4 (Summer 1969): 105.

temporarily. In challenging the exclusivity of such power, such activity approaches the supposedly untouchable cultural monolith of the centre – and claims the possibility for the margin to "push back." Such positioning suggests the possibilities of an empowerment through the deliberate invocation of marginality, of a flexibility that cannot be attained solely through allying oneself with the norm. That flexibility recognises a necessary involvement with existing discourses of power – and characterises self-determination ot only in the nomination of individual identity but through the empowerment to participate in the mechanisms that recognise and articulate that identity. As this discussion has suggested, the strength of that participation may be its refusal to take on homogenous forms.

Re-invention

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate how a queer critical approach to performance reveals an involvement of activists and theatre practitioners in the construction of marginal subjects. In particular, their choice of working methods and performance conventions has suggested an interest in marginality that goes beyond a straightforward claim to normativity. Though many of the texts within this study have drawn upon "real lives," those narratives have emphasised social, historical and cultural location of those lives. In doing so, that focus has articulated the underlying, unmarked discourses of power which shape the visibility and viability of marginal identities.

This work has frequently articulated a need to address the specific social locations in which marginal subjects appear, recognising that not all difference from a supposed norm is the same kind of difference – and, correspondingly, that punitive difference might not be resolved through identical claims on normativity. Consequently, this project has suggested the ways in which the category of the marginal may exercise its own discursive limits. Rather than operating as the default category into which all non-passing or non-heterosexual subjects fall, we might understand marginality as a discourse which exercises its own selective processes of recognition and legitimisation. Finally, this discussion has indicated the direction in which both

theory and performance may be moving, in attempts to recognise subjectivities beyond those who pass and those who do not: developing a political vocabulary to account for the political constituency of those who cannot and will not pass, as well as those who might choose to intentionally reject their apparent normality. Such an interest is not intended to disparage the very real material and political achievements of earlier forms of activism, but to ask if and how that work might be taken forward. Unmarked performances – or rather, performances of the unmarked – continue to present particular challenges for theatrical representation, challenges which queer theory may provide the means to address.

Appendix A: Gay Sweatshop archive

For ease of presentation, material from the company records of the Gay Sweatshop archive is referenced in text as it appears in the index of the library at Royal Holloway, University of London.

All documents are typescript unless otherwise indicated.

GS/1/1/1, Constitutions and policies.
GS/1/1/12, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Board meetings.

GS/1/2/1/12, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Board meetings.
GS/1/2/1/17, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Meetings.
GS/1/2/1/18, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Meetings.
GS/1/2/1/22, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Meetings.
GS/1/2/1/25, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Meetings.
GS/1/2/9, Minutes of Gay Sweatshop Board meetings.

GS/1/3/1/1, Resignation letters from Gay Sweatshop members.

GS/3/3/1/1, Production records for "Any Woman Can," Jill Posener.
GS/3/2/1, Script for "Mister X," Roger Baker.
GS/3/3/1/4, Production records for "Any Woman Can."

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(See appendix A for works cited from the Gay Sweatshop archive.)

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